



MARCH/APRIL 2000
\$4.95/CANADA \$5.95

DAVID SHAW
HOW I GOT THAT STORY

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

A THOUSAND VOICES BLOOM

The Media Critics: Special Report

#BXFBFB *****5-DIGIT 48103

#48103MCR300SR001#
BG 0170 BN 0001
48103MCR300SR00A JRCL 245
XEROX U MICROFILMS
SERIALS
300 N ZEEB RD
ANN ARBOR MI 48103-1553

A newspaper has a responsibility
to cover the community it serves.

It also has a responsibility
to serve the community it covers.

Feature?



The most important things we can give our
children are logos and options. Four out of five
kids in our local schools are facing a life
without basic reading and writing skills.
We have a small window of opportunity to
give our children a chance for a better future.
Help our children, and help ourselves.
Volunteer to be a classroom reader.



Times Mirror



What's missing from your newspaper's Web site?

AP Associated Press

RealNetworks 

AP Streaming News with RealNetworks

For news that words alone cannot deliver, AP brings you real-time sound and video of the day's top stories. It's called AP Streaming News.

AP Streaming News with RealNetworks delivers anchored audio news, business and sports summaries, breaking news video clips and live events. Placing video and audio on your Web site has never been easier. And this is just the beginning.

For more information on AP Streaming News, our Election 2000 Internet service and other Web services, you can contact your local AP chief of bureau or Jim Kennedy, director of AP Multimedia Services, at 212-621-7200.

CJR CONTENTS

MARCH/APRIL 2000

"To assess the performance of journalism . . . to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent" —From the founding editorial, 1961

VOICES

MITCHELL STEPHENS	58
Why Are There So Many Doors in Movies?	
GENEVA OVERHOLSER	60
Newspapers Lag as Net Races Ahead	
GENE COLLIER	62
How About Psychological Testing for the Media?	
MIKE HOYT	63
True Radio Confessions: Time to Move That Dial?	
LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN	64
Reflections on Broadcast Award Winners	

BOOK REVIEWS



SOUTH AFRICAN MEMOIRS	67
Reviewed by Les Payne	
A LIFE IN BROADCAST	70
Reviewed by Joanmarie Kalter	
BOOK REPORTS	71
by James Boylan	

COVER ILLUSTRATION: ROB HARRELL

ARTICLES

COVER STORY/ THE MEDIA CRITICS	34
A THOUSAND VOICES BLOOM	34
Media critics abound, in print and on the Web. Do they make a significant difference? By James Boylan	
MAGAZINES REVIEWED	36
David Hall on the <i>American Journalism Review</i> Michael Gartner on <i>Brill's Content</i> Ben Yagoda on the <i>Columbia Journalism Review</i>	
OTHER MAGAZINES, ETC.	39/41
Notes by Tracy McNamara and Brent Cunningham	
TELEVISION	42
Critics on-air and in print. By Neil Hickey	
MAINSTREAM MEDIA CRITICS	43
Critics' report card. By Jonathan Z. Larsen	
THE INTERNET	46
Ready, set, publish. By James Ledbetter	
THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS	48
Watchdogs with attitude. By James B. Kelleher	
ACADEMICS Sources of ideas and conflicts. By Roy Peter Clark	50
OMBUDSMEN Protecting readers' interests. By Josh Getlin	51

FEATURES

MEGA-MERGER FRENZY AOL-Time Warner; nothing will ever be the same, reports Neil Hickey	16
A JOURNALIST'S LIFE Kevin Heldman tells grim stories for APnews.com, by Mike Hoyt. What is APnews.com? Brent Cunningham explains	21
HOW I GOT THAT STORY David Shaw recounts the <i>Los Angeles Times</i> investigation.	27
EXPERT WITNESS Tips for journalists on global warming	52
CHANNEL ONE The news show most-watched by teens	55

DEPARTMENTS

LETTERS	6
CURRENTS	8
DARTS & LAURELS	14
THE LOWER CASE	73

When the DeBruce Grain elevator—the largest of its type in the world—blew up in Wichita, it sent a shock wave through agricultural communities across the nation.

Minutes after the explosion, The Wichita Eagle dispatched every available person to cover the disaster that killed seven and injured 10 others.

More than 50 reporters, editors, photographers and graphic artists worked nonstop to bring the story home for readers.

As the rescue continued, another team of Eagle reporters began investigating what went wrong. They discovered that workers regularly worked amid explosive levels of grain dust, because dust collection systems had not worked properly, if at all. Further investigation

UNCOVERING THE FRIGHTENING

revealed that Kansas grain silos were not inspected for safety unless

there was an accident or complaint by a worker.

These revelations led the government to step up safety inspections and re-interview workers for important details. The Eagle reporters had uncovered. In fact, graphics developed by The Eagle were so authoritative that investigators used them to help explain events.

Now, one last question needed answering before the community could put this tragedy behind it: What actually caused the blast? Once again, The Eagle reporters were first to report that an inadequately lubricated bearing on a conveyor belt had frozen, causing friction that set off the blast.

Ultimately, the elevator's operators were ordered to pay \$1.7 million, the largest fine in state history for a grain explosion. DeBruce has appealed.

Today, the federal government is still investigating possible criminal charges. And The Eagle has led the reporting on this, as well.

Tragedies bring people together. In this case, The Wichita Eagle, which prides itself on having a team-based newsroom, proved that teamwork can lead to extraordinary journalism.

Knight Ridder. What a difference a newspaper can make.



Fast reaction got Eagle photographer Travis Heying into the air within minutes of the blast to bring readers what would become the dominant image of this tragic day—an injured elevator worker, sitting atop one of the 246 damaged silos, waiting for rescue. Within an hour of the explosion, authorities closed the airspace over the elevator, preventing further aerial photos for a week.

>KNIGHT RIDDER>

We're local,
coast to coast,
in newspapers...

- The Philadelphia Inquirer
- Detroit Free Press
- The Miami Herald & el Nuevo Herald
- San Jose Mercury News
- The Kansas City Star
- The Charlotte Observer
- Fort Worth Star-Telegram
- Saint Paul Pioneer Press
- Contra Costa Newspapers
- Philadelphia Daily News
- Akron Beacon Journal
- The [Columbia, S.C.] State
- Lexington [Ky.] Herald-leader
- The Wichita [Kan.] Eagle
- The Macon [Ga.] Telegraph
- Tallahassee [Fla.] Democrat
- The [Wilkes-Barre, Pa.] Times Leader
- Duluth [Minn.] News-Tribune
- Belleville [Ill.] News-Democrat
- Columbus [Ga.] Ledger-Enquirer

INFORMATION FOR LIFE

...and on the
Real Cities Network.

REAL
CITIES

www.realcities.com

IRE IN NYC



IRE NATIONAL CONFERENCE JUNE 1-4, 2000 HILTON WALDORF-ASTORIA

Join the best in the business for the 25th anniversary of Investigative Reporters and Editors.



- ◆ Dozens of panels on investigative techniques
- ◆ Panels on writing and editing
- ◆ International reporting workshops
- ◆ Roundtables on ethics and other issues
- ◆ Broadcast show and tell
- ◆ Job opportunities
- ◆ Information vendors
- ◆ Optional computer-assisted reporting (CAR) day

Registration for June 2-4: \$150 (students, \$100)
Optional June 1 CAR Day: \$50 (student, \$35)

To register online or for more information, visit
www.ire.org or call 573-882-2042.



FROM DAVID LAVENTHOL
PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Addicts and Critics

I confess to an addiction: I love rankings. There's a certainty to them that is reassuring in an uncertain world. When I was a kid the most important list was of the best baseball players; later in newsrooms, people argued over the latest Top Ten. And what a time it is now for rankings. From *Time's* person of the last hundred years (Albert Einstein), to A&E's man of the millennium (Johann Gutenberg), to ESPN's athlete of the century (Michael Jordan). So picking the best newspapers and the best magazine editors seemed as logical as a *New York Times* front page.

Not all of our readers agree. We received several dozen e-mails and letters suggesting that the rankings we ran ("America's Best Newspapers," the "Ten Best Magazine Editors") didn't belong in CJR. "Trivial Pursuit," as one writer labeled it. And the reviewer who evaluated CJR for this issue's special report on press criticism liked neither our rankings nor our methodology for arriving at them.

We appreciate the point of view of those who objected, and who took the time to write us. But many overlooked what I think is the real value of such lists: they can be useful benchmarks for identifying unique accomplishments — and for sharing those accomplishments with a larger audience. For many readers, these rankings may be a way of learning something that they didn't know, while being a conversation piece at the same time.

In exchanges over the past few months readers cited "learning something I didn't know" as the principal reason they subscribed to this magazine, particularly learning about what is going to happen to journalism as the Internet moves at warp speed to change the world's information structure.

This changing world is one of heavy time demands and multiple media choices. To us this means good writing and inviting graphics to make it easier for you to get the information you need.

To consistently broaden our range, we've added columnists focusing on newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and public attitudes. We've also strengthened CJR as a forum for the exchange of ideas about journalism with the Voices section and the Expert Witness feature. And in our cover stories we've tried to step back from the fray and give a longer view of issues such as covering sports and politics.

Our primary mission remains the same as it has been for four decades and still appears on our contents page: to be the leading publication that assesses journalistic performance; to help stimulate continued improvement in the profession; and to speak out when issues demand it, with the permanent goal of insuring the unfettered journalism necessary for our democratic society to work.

Our mission was foremost in our minds when we decided to take a major look at the media critics: Are these publications and people doing the job? Are they upholding and strengthening journalistic standards? By the way, I can't say I agree with all the comments in the review of CJR, but we felt it was important that we go under the microscope in the same way others are.

There's a lot else in this issue but you can scan the contents page for specifics. Besides, if I listed them, I might feel an urge to rank them. ■

Why 300 Bay Area Writers Demand a New Trial for Journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a writer and journalist who has spent the last 18 years of his life on Pennsylvania's death row.

In the 1982 trial that convicted him of killing Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner, Abu-Jamal was denied the right to defend himself. He was assigned a court-appointed attorney who was unprepared to mount an effective defense, banished from the courtroom for much of his trial, and judged by a jury from which his peers were systematically excluded. His political views were used to argue that he should be put to death.

In his appeals of this conviction, Abu-Jamal presented evidence that witnesses were intimidated and coerced to provide false testimony, that a purported "confession" was fabricated by the police, and that vital evidence was withheld from the defense.

But Abu-Jamal was forced to make his appeals before the same judge that sentenced him to death in 1982. That judge, Albert Sabo, is notorious for having sentenced 33 people to death (all but two of them people of color), more than twice as many as any other sitting judge in the United States. Judge Sabo rejected Abu-Jamal's bids for a new trial, and last fall the elected justices of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court concurred, paving the way for Abu-Jamal's execution.

Voice of the Voiceless

At the time of his arrest, Abu-Jamal was a well-respected journalist, known for his exposure of police brutality against Philadelphia's minority communities. In the 18 years that Abu-Jamal has been locked up on death row, he has written almost 400 columns and two books. His writings give a human face and a voice to a U.S. prison population which now numbers 1.8 million, with more than 3,500 prisoners on death row.

Abu-Jamal's eloquent exposure of criminal injustice and his unflagging stand in defense of poor and working people have made him the target of an increasingly strident effort to hasten his execution and silence his voice.

In May 1994, caving in to pressure from the Fraternal Order of Police, National Public Radio canceled a series of 10 Abu-Jamal commentaries produced for their news show 'All Things Considered'. After publication of his book *Live From Death Row*, prison authorities placed Abu-Jamal in punitive detention. They have illegally opened his mail and barred him from contacts with journalists. Since October, 1996, no recordings or photographs of Abu-Jamal have been allowed. As Abu-Jamal puts it, "They don't just want my death, they want my silence."

Meanwhile, establishment media, ignoring evidence of his innocence, has branded Abu-Jamal a "cop killer" and attempted to discredit both him and his supporters.

Abu-Jamal must not be silenced. He must not be executed. He deserves a new trial free of judicial and prosecutorial misconduct.

Abu-Jamal has been granted a stay of execution, pending the outcome of his appeal in the Federal Courts. Pressure from justice-loving people around the world stopped Abu-Jamal's execution in 1995. Today this pressure must be multiplied ten-fold. We join those demanding a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal and urge you to do the same.

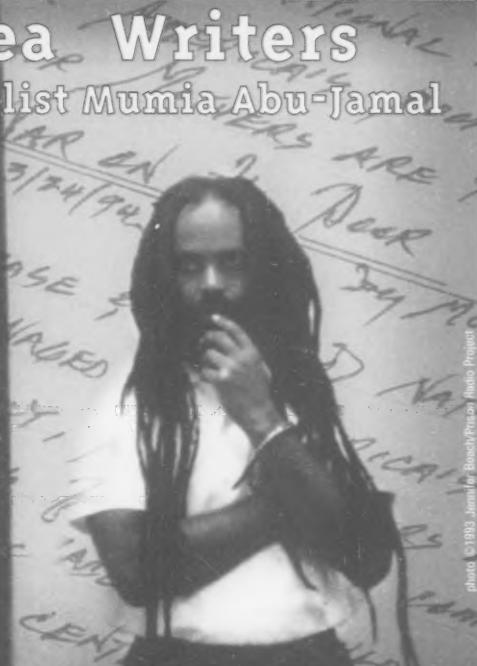


photo © 1993 Jennifer Beach/Priison Radio Project

STOP THE EXECUTION

Partial listing of signatories:

For more information:

Phone 510.839.1248 Email nwusf@icg.org
<http://www.icg.org/nwusf/mumia.html>

This ad sponsored by: National Writers Union, Bay Area • Media Alliance • PEN Oakland • Pacific News Service • Independent Press Association • PEN American Center West • International Black Writers and Artists, #5

design by 3point2 & jam

Published by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism
Dean: Tom Goldstein

PUBLISHER AND EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: David Lenthal

MANAGING EDITOR: Gloria Cooper

SENIOR EDITOR: Mike Hoyt

EDITOR AT LARGE: Neil Hickey

ART DIRECTOR: Nancy Novick

ASSISTANT EDITORS: Brent Cunningham, Tracy McNamara

EDITORIAL/PRODUCTION: Tom O'Neill

ASSISTANT TO PUBLISHER: Susan Teitz

INTERNS: Aparna Surendran, Laura Hertzfeld

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER: Dennis F. Giza

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR: Louisa D. Kearney

BUSINESS ASSISTANT: Kathleen Brow

CONSULTANT: Samuel E. Schulman

ONLINE PRODUCER: Peter Leonard

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

James Boylan, Christopher Hanson, Trudy Lieberman, Michael Massing, Bruce Porter, Bruce Selcraig, Alvin Shuster, Steve Weinberg, Barry Yeoman

EDITORIAL ADVISERS

Philip S. Balboni, Jim Carey, Phyllis Malarum Clark, Barbara Cochran, Robert Curvin, Arthur Gelb, Alex Jones, Jonathan Z. Larsen, John Leo, Janice C. Simpson, Sally Bedell Smith, Judy Woodruff

CJR is a member of The Leadership Network (212) 375-1575

MAJOR DONOR

The Ford Foundation

DONORS

Cabot Family Charitable Trust
The MacArthur Foundation

TO CONTACT US:

Editorial: (212) 854-1881
Advertising: (212) 854-3958
Business: (212) 854-2716
Subscriptions: (888) 425-7782
Fax: (212) 854-8580
e-mail: CJR@columbia.edu

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

Journalism Building
2950 Broadway
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027

On the Web: www.cjr.org

LETTERS

TUNNEL VISION

The "Ten Best Magazine Editors," plus "five more to watch" (CJR, January/February) — and not a single person of color in the bunch. Would it have been too much to venture even a few steps beyond the lily-white, elite-identified insular little world of corporate editors, perhaps to find even one person who writes for a different audience, or is not entirely infatuated with the glamour of big money?

I could get you the phone number for George Curry, the editor-in-chief of *Emere*. Emil Wilbekin of *Vibe* can't be hard to find. On the intellectual side, Wole Soyinka, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of *Transition* offer something much more savory than the usual dry academic fare.

And *Teen People*? Give me a break! What about *Teen Voices*, *Bitch*, and *Busi*? These are the magazines on the cutting edge. They keep company with a raft of visionary periodicals that speak to the politics and passions of the vast communities outside of elite circles. The fact that your panel didn't select even one of them shows just how heedless the commercial magazine industry is of its own racism and isolation.

JOHN ANNER
Executive director
Independent Press
Association
San Francisco, California

In your January/February cover package, "Sports Journalism: What's the Score?" you

claim to look "in depth at sports journalism," but some of the best new sports journalism is happening in a medium you virtually ignored.

Too many sports journalists play the waiting-for-cliques game, and in the process, like Gene Collier ("The Ex-Sportswriter"), become cynical about a world that they helped to create and perpetuate. As they shift to different beats or retire from journalism altogether, others are looking at sports in whole new ways, and the fruits of their labors show on Web sites, discussion groups, and e-mail newsletters.

JEFF MERRON
Executive editor
SportsJones.com
Atlanta, Georgia

NUMBERS GAME

In your sports-package sidebar titled "Growth Industry" you state that television is devoting more time to sports coverage. As evidence you provide the information that in 1987 ABC, CBS, and NBC devoted 1,483 hours to sports coverage, but "by 1997 the figure (which by then included Fox) had climbed to 1,935 [hours]."

Now, I agree that 1,935 is larger than 1,483. However, by adding a fourth outlet, the average hours per network actually decreased. So while the total number of hours of sports coverage has indeed gone up, the average per network went down.

Perhaps this is a minor point, but if a reporter working for me had written that sidebar, I would have asked

for further clarification, or a different conclusion.

BEN DELANEY
President and publisher
CyberEdge Information
Services, Inc.
Sausalito, California

TRY SHORTHAND

A lot of the controversies surrounding changing quotes ("Don't Touch That Quote," CJR, January/February) would be avoided if reporters simply did a better job of getting full and accurate quotes.

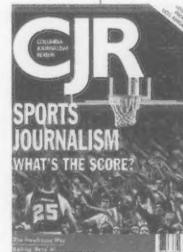
But I find that it's precisely because reporters put accuracy above all else that quotes often suffer. Reporters will sometimes come back from an interview and tell me about all the great things a source said, but when I get their stories they're filled with fractured, partial quotes that are less than compelling.

When I was a cub reporter in New Jersey, I was frustrated by missing good quotes so I took a Gregg shorthand course. I much preferred shorthand to a tape recorder. Batteries can die, pause buttons can be accidentally hit, poor acoustics can render a speech unintelligible — and you never seem to have it with you when you run into the city council president.

When I recommend learning shorthand, I usually get some version of, "Hmm, that might be a good idea for some, but I've developed my own version of shorthand."

There's a big difference between Gregg shorthand and some made-up version. It should be a part of every journalism curriculum.

DAN HOLLY
Assistant metro editor
The News & Observer
Raleigh, North Carolina



DIFFERENT STROKES

I read Brent Cunningham's piece on "The Newhouse Way" (CJR, January/February) with interest, and some amount of confusion. If he had dug a little deeper, he would have discovered that the chain's "business tabs" are as different from its dailies as night and day.

As a former employee of the oldest of those "tabs," I can state that all of them are starved for cash and run solely for the bottom line by publishers who have never worked in newsrooms and wouldn't know journalism if it fell out of the sky and landed on their heads. I can recall regular quotas, story counts that had to be met every week. Money and resources for anything that would take more than three days to research was out of the question. Reporters were encouraged, even expected, to hawk subscriptions and pass along potential advertising contacts to the sales reps. At the particular paper I worked at, no less than seven reporters and/or editors have walked out, never to return, in the past two years. This in a newsroom of eleven, including the editors. What a pity Newhouse doesn't place as much importance on its weekly business journals as it does on its daily papers.

MICHAEL BECKER
Kansas City, Missouri

DOUBLE TAKE

Please tell me that's not what you had in mind on pages 14 and 15 of the January/February issue where you sized two photos (Epstein and Silvers, and Webber and Taylor) where otherwise you had one. Please tell me that was a Quark or Pagemaker mistake. Please tell me that was an error on the part of the printer. Please tell

me that's not what you had intended. The end result is . . . what's the best way to say it? . . . awful?

Sorry to be so blunt.

RICH SKYZINSKI
Managing editor
Golf Journal
Flower Mound, Texas

RHAPSODY FOR A ROGUE

Re: John Shurtleff's letter chiding Gail Collins for "rhapsodizing" over her "Republican father's adoration for Boston mayor James Michael Curley" (CJR, January/February): As a life-long Bostonian with memories of Curley, I would not describe my feelings for him as "adoration," but he certainly was an interesting character. Just to set Shurtleff straight, Curley was never convicted or charged with income tax evasion. In 1903, when he was twenty-five years old, he was convicted of taking a civil service examination as a "ringer" for a friend who was not quite smart enough to pass it. His supporters used this incident to their advantage in his subsequent campaign for his first term as mayor (1913), presenting their hero as having "tried to help out someone less fortunate." Forty-two years later, a month after election to what would be his final term as mayor, Curley was convicted of mail fraud. His peripheral role in the scheme would probably have warranted a suspended sentence or probation but for his prior conviction.

Between 1913 and 1955, he was a candidate for mayor of Boston in every election in which he was eligible. He was elected four times. In between he served one term as governor, two terms in Congress, and lost a run for the U.S. Senate to Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. in 1936. A rogue? Absolutely. But interesting?

Who ever wrote a book like *The Purple Shamrock* about William McKinley, Warren Harding, John W. Bricker, or any of the Tafts?

ROBERT J. SHERER
Brookline, Massachusetts

THE FORGOTTEN

Certainly the papers cited in "America's Best Newspapers" (CJR, November/December) are terrific journals. But not once in the entire piece, including the subsequent explanation of how these papers were chosen, was photojournalism or visual journalism mentioned as one of the considered criteria. Quite a few of the papers chosen have won the prestigious Pictures of the Year award. Several others have won Pulitzer Prizes for their photojournalism. A couple of newspapers have won both awards. Yet, somehow, CJR didn't consider photojournalism an important enough criterion to factor it into the judging of the best twenty-five newspapers in America.

As we continue to fight for our newspaper lives with increasingly visual media such as the Internet and cable/satellite television, a newspaper's visual journalists become ever-more important to its success — something that tends to be overlooked by too many "word" people who should know better.

RUSS KENDALL
Director of photography
Bangor Daily News
Bangor, Maine

VISUAL LITERACY

As a former weekend news editor of Baltimore's *Sun*, I can attest to the excellence, depth, and compassion Jed Kirschbaum brings to his photography ("A Journalist's Life," CJR, November/Dec-

ember). For nearly five years, ending in 1991, I relied on Jed's skills to make many a Sunday and Monday front page visually enticing and informative.

Jed had a proper disdain for editors who didn't understand how he thought and couldn't grasp his reasoning as to why one image was better than another. More than one Sunday I left the lab with my ears verbally boxed — and my page in A-1 shape.

PETE WETMORE
Senior editor, News Inc.
Urbana, Illinois

SORRY, WRONG LETTER

If these are the best, what would the worst be like? The anagrams for the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Newark Star-Ledger* use extra letters and/or don't use all the letters in the papers' names.

WAYNE WILLE
Radford, Virginia

Editors' note: The Newark Star-Ledger anagram should have been "We're Grand Talkers." The *Chicago Tribune* was way off base. An appropriate one listed among hundreds at www.genius2000.com was "Gotcha: rub in ice."

Columbia Journalism Review (ISSN 0010 - 194X) is published bimonthly. Volume XXXVIII, Number 6 March/April 2000. Copyright © 2000 Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. Subscription rates: one year \$19.95; two years \$34.95; three years \$47.95. Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add \$4 per year. Back issues: \$5.50. Please address all subscription mail to: Columbia Journalism Review, Subscription Service Department, P.O. Box 578, Mt. Morris, IL 61054; (888) 425-7782. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. No claims for back copies honored after one year. National newsstand distribution: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior St., Sandusky, Ohio 44870. **Postmaster:** send Form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review, P.O. Box 578, Mt. Morris, IL 61054. Printed in the U.S.A.

CURRENTS

NOT OK, AGAIN, IN OKLAHOMA

Just when we thought Oklahoma City's *Daily Oklahoman* might relinquish its grasp on the title of "The Worst Newspaper in America" (see CJR, January/February 1999), its volatile billionaire publisher, Ed Gaylord, has tightened his grip on the prize. He fired his brand new editor.

Last April Gaylord, so arch-conservative that well into the '80s editors understood he was upset by feature photos of blacks on the front page, stunned his newsroom by hiring former *Mobile Register* editor Stan Tiner to be his new executive editor. The eighty-year-old owner did not take a lead role in recruiting Tiner, but he must have known that Tiner had revived the moribund *Register* partly by championing minority issues, public schools, and sacred-cow-free journalism — all foreign concepts to the *Oklahoman*.

With a zeal that alienated some entrenched staffers, Tiner launched a long-overdue redesign of Oklahoma's largest paper, hired new

columnists and editors, pushed for more diverse opinions on the paper's reactionary editorial page, and expanded the newshole. He pushed writers toward a more focused, incisive journalism. Daily and Sunday circulation, which had been dropping, increased.

Yet, without explanation, Gaylord had Tiner fired January 10, nine months after he arrived. An announcement in the paper simply said that Tiner had been replaced by Sue Hale, a loyal thirty-four-year veteran. Tiner wouldn't comment but Gaylord freely offered his version of events.

"Tiner just didn't fit," Gaylord told CJR. "Our newsroom was very happy to hear that he was leaving. He was kind of a dictator, never asked people for their opinions. It just didn't work out." Gaylord said he had decided to fire Tiner "months before" his abrupt departure, and that no single story or event triggered his firing.

While *Oklahoman* staffers say Tiner disagreed often with editorial page editor Patrick McGuigan, they say Tiner probably never suspected that a Monday morning meeting with general manager Ed Martin would be his last. Tiner "walked into



Ex-editor Tiner and the "other king," Ed Gaylord (inset)

that meeting all chipper," says one observer. "Then he came out, grabbed his briefcase and left the building. He's never been back." Tiner and his wife, Vicki, moved back to Mobile in February.

Some reporters thought hubris and lack of self-preservation skills doomed Tiner. "King Stan forgot there was another king," says one.

Whether Tiner could have saved himself is debatable, but clearly he knew he was afflicting the comfortable. The first part of an education series that began December 16 found that Oklahoma City's "School Choice," a magnet-school program that was supposed to remedy de facto segregation, was actually a largely white "haven for the wealthy and well-educated." This infuriated McGuigan, a relentless critic of public schools, who newsroom sources believe lobbied for Tiner's firing.

On the same day, the paper ran the first of a three-part series on the death of Karen Silkwood, the plutonium whistleblower at a Kerr-McGee nuclear plant near Crescent, Oklahoma. The story was a tame backgrounder with no

revelations, but the remaining two stories in the Silkwood series mysteriously never ran. Newspaper sources say Kerr-McGee officials complained. Kerr-McGee c.e.o. Luke Corbett declined to comment. Gaylord denies being contacted by the Oklahoma City company, but says the Silkwood piece was "a bad story" that should have been cleared with him first. Soon after the stories were killed, the paper ran a laudatory editorial on Kerr-McGee.

Just before Tiner and his wife headed off for Mobile, a group of current and former *Oklahoman* subscribers spent \$1,200 on a full-page "open letter" ad in the alternative *Oklahoma Gazette* to say goodbye. "You offered us a breath of fresh air, new insights, and renewed faith, all presented with a great sense of style," the ad read, in part. Dr. Robin Acker, who collected for the ad at his office and church, told the *Gazette* that some people just wanted to say thanks. "He may have disappeared," Acker said, "but it didn't go unnoticed."

—Bruce Selcraig
Selcraig is a contributing editor to CJR.

HARD NUMBERS

1998: 42 percent of publications surveyed did not have their own Web site

1999: 7 percent of publications surveyed did not have their own Web site

1998: 74 percent of print journalists said they use the Internet for research

1999: 90 percent of print journalists said they use the Internet for research

1998: 6 percent of newspaper journalists said they never go online

1999: 2 percent of newspaper journalists said they never go online

All statistics are from the Middleberg/Ross "Print Media in Cyberspace" reports from 1998 and 1999. The report, produced by the public relations firm Middleberg and Associates, surveyed managing and business editors of daily newspapers and the managing editors of magazines.

—Laura Hertzfeld

WHY CANADA IS SHRINKING

The *New York Times* Berlin correspondent covers Germany from Berlin. Its Nairobi correspondent covers Kenya from Nairobi. And its Canada correspondent covers Canada from . . . Denver, Colorado?

Canada and the U.S. share the world's largest trading relationship but a number of American publications are leaving Canada, many of them citing unfriendly tax policies. In recent years, the *Chicago Tribune* closed its Canada bureau and the *Los Angeles Times* assigned a reporter to cover the nation from Manhattan. In December, *Business Week* closed its office, citing editorial restructuring. "The cumulative effect is that Canada is the most important, under-covered country in the American press," says James Brooke, *The New York Times*'s Canada bureau chief, from his Denver "bureau in exile."

The *Times* joined the exodus last summer after paying \$114,000 in income tax to Revenue Canada for its resident reporter. The sky-high bill results in part from "tax equalization," in which the company pays the tax bill that is over and above what employees would pay if they were working in the U.S. An American in Canada could be taxed as high as 52 percent when federal and provincial rates are combined. But it isn't the higher rates that the *Times* objects to — it's what happens next. Under Canadian rules the money paid for tax equalization is added to the correspondent's salary as income in the following year. Thus the amount builds, year after year.

Meanwhile, the correspondents do not qualify for many benefits that Canadians enjoy, such as medical coverage. When the companies pay for these expenses, this money too

is counted as taxable benefit. "Either change the taxes or change the accessibility to benefits," says Steven Pearlstein, Canada correspondent for *The Washington Post*.

In an attempt to avoid closing the Toronto bureau, Joseph Lelyveld, the *New York Times* executive editor, went so far as to write to Jean Chrétien, requesting relief, but the prime minister was unmoved.

Some U.S. news organizations manage to survive on Canadian soil. *The Wall Street Journal*'s bureau staff members are employees of a Canadian subsidiary, so tax equalization is not an issue.

The Associated Press is committed to staying despite the financial burden, according to Kelly Smith Tunney, a spokesperson for AP. "We don't pull out if they are shooting at us," she says, "so we wouldn't pull out for tax reasons."

— Dayna E. Simon
Simon is a writer and lawyer in Toronto.

CENSORSHIP IN SPACE?



WWW.SPACEIMAGING.COM

Four hundred miles up, a new satellite called IKANOS is taking pictures of such clarity that it can record objects a single meter across. Space Imaging, Inc. is making such "one-meter-resolution" images — like this January 3 shot of Taipei — commercially available. Fearful that some images could compromise foreign policy objectives, the Clinton administration wants to give the secretaries of state and defense "shutter control" over specific images. Journalists — led by CBS and the RTNDA — argue that such a policy would let politicians hide newsworthy events, and that it amounts to prior restraint. Discussions continue as both sides wait for a test case.

— Matthew Hay Brown

THE P.M. REPORT

The afternoon newspapers may have one foot in the grave, but dying isn't always easy. P.M. papers with complicated ownership arrangements are not going all that gently into that good night.

■ Last October, if all had gone according to script, the P.M. *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, owned by Liberty Newspapers, was to have published its last edition. The *Star-Bulletin*'s JOA partner, the Gannett-owned *Honolulu Advertiser*, intended to pay Liberty \$26.5 million to end the JOA and cease publication. But the state of Hawaii sued, arguing that the deal violates antitrust measures in the Newspaper



Preservation Act. U.S. district judge Alan C. Kay agreed, stating that Gannett's payment would eliminate competition, and issued an order preventing the *Star-Bulletin* from closing down. Gannett unsuccessfully petitioned to rehear. Trial is set for September 2000.

■ Ripples from Honolulu may have affected the afternoon *San Francisco Examiner*, owned by Hearst. In August, Hearst announced it would buy its JOA partner, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, owned by the Chronicle Publishing Company. In turn, Hearst would

put the *Examiner* up for sale. If Hearst could not find a buyer, it would merge the two.

At first, Hearst offered only the name and subscriber list. In response to criticism from the Justice Department, Hearst upgraded its offer in January to include presses and other equipment. Several offers then came in by the February 15 deadline, including one from Clint Reilly, a millionaire political consultant who has filed a federal lawsuit in an effort to keep the *Examiner* alive.

Stay tuned.
—Aparna Surendran
Surendran is an intern for CJR.

CURRENTS

IN CUBA, LEARNING TO LISTEN

Tracy McNamara, an assistant editor at CJR, traveled to Cuba through a State Department-sanctioned trip organized through Columbia University. Here is her report.

On a typical, dusty street in Havana, you are struck by the beauty: pink facade on an old building; damp, colorful laundry hanging from windows; a big, blue 1950s Chevrolet moving along a cobblestone road. But when you observe more closely, you see the crumbling walls, hanging electrical wires, cement floors, and thin, broken front doors.

This is the duality of Cuba. There are hospitals with free health care but no medicine; beautiful universities filled with scholars but only a few old computers and no paper supplies; cute restaurants with extensive menus but only three unsavory items available. And journalism schools with rugged young journalists but a fettered press.

In Cuba, you must look deeper into your surroundings and you must read deeper into what Cubans say. We meet with a group of journalism students at the University of Havana. They start the conversation by telling us they'd like to work at news organizations like CNN and ESPN. Worn backpacks slung over their shoulders and tattered notebooks in hand, they seem braced for a confrontation. Aware of their visitors' predisposed notions about press freedom, many of them seem ready to advocate for their government.

"Listen, we have different systems," explains Charlie, a student who reads *The New*

York Times online. He knows that we have our own journalistic problems in the U.S. "In a market system, you cater your stories to sell papers."

It is a semester break, but there are about seventeen Cuban students present — all energetic, all defensive, and all eager to talk about Cuban and U.S. media. Elián González, whose face graces posters all over Havana, comes up only briefly, in exasperated tones as the students explain that his story is all that the Cuban newspapers write about these days. The bright classroom is filled with opinions, expressed in mixed Spanish and English. The women are as forceful as the men, and all of them look anguished as they try to express a thoughtful defense of Cuban press.

The dean of the communications school, Julio García Luis, says that while there is no student newspaper due to scarcity of paper, students are free to write or broadcast any story elsewhere. He serves us Dixie cups of sugared espresso, and after a while, leaves the room. But the students want to talk some more. About Mariah Carey, the Beastie Boys, and the New York Yankees. And then more about journalism and Castro. Some students giggle nervously and gesture with their hands. They could not talk so candidly with their professors near, they explain.

Now we hear another layer: when a student researched a story for a local station on how Cuban children cannot afford toys, not only would nobody speak on the record but Raúl Castro (Fidel's brother) prohibited the story from airing. He called up the dean and cen-

sored the piece, the students say, because it portrayed a negative image of Cuba (the dean denies this). I hear Lester, a student who is listening nearby, snort in laughter at the notion that their press is free. Yes, Charlie says, he does want to work at ESPN, but he knows this is only a dream. He would, after all, have to leave the country, which is all but prohibited.

By the end of our stay, we learn to listen to Cubans carefully. We wait to hear the second layer. The Cubans do seem to care what visitors, especially Americans, who are rarely allowed into Cuba, think of

their country. On one level, the reasons are simple: tourist dollars boost their economy, so they'd like more of them. Public opinion in their favor may help lift the crushing U.S. embargo, which is making them poorer.

Talk to a Cuban, and in five minutes you'll be told how Cubans are faring better than most other Latin American countries, how their children are educated, safe, and well-fed.

Yet, this dichotomy reflects their lives: Cubans are both very proud and privately critical of their nation. Private since they can't be public.

LANGUAGE CORNER

UP WITH PEOPLE

After reading under the heading "People Need People" in the November/December CJR that "people" is almost always preferable to the stilted "persons," Margo Young, director of academic publications at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Business Administration, e-mailed with a question. She noted that in *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White, a kind of mini-bible for generations of writers, "persons" gets preference for some contexts. The good book declares: "The word *people* is best not used with words of number, in place of *persons*. If of 'six people' five went away, how many people would be left behind? Answer: one *people*." Ms. Young asked, "Whom should we use today as the standard: Streisand or Strunk and White?"

We're better off with Streisand on this one. "Persons"

has never seemed natural, but a lot of us learned to use it years ago as part of the near-ubiquitous Associated Press style. Times change. It's no longer style at the AP or, also in a change, at *The New York Times*. Both prescribe "people" except for such established idioms as "displaced persons" and "missing persons."

And the Strunk and White argument didn't really make sense. For centuries, the natural, standard English plural for "person" has been "people." And S&W to the contrary notwithstanding, using "people" as an all-purpose plural never locked anyone into using "people" as a singular. So, to the S&W question, the reply, "Answer: one person."

—Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing right is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, www.cjr.org.

REMEMBERING NEW HAMPSHIRE



JOHN BORN

RUGBY JOURNALISM
A media scrum encircles
candidate Bradley

It seems long ago now. The campaign has shifted into jets and away from town meetings. But for the month of January New Hampshire was the journalistic place to be. Here are some impressions from two who were there.

JOHN CARROLL WGBH, Boston

As managing editor of a public affairs show that includes a weekly "Beat the Press" program, Carroll covered journalists as they covered the primary.

SCENE 1: The packed press room in the basement of Manchester's WMUR-TV after the January 26 Republican presidential debate. One reporter is calling another reporter on a cell phone. Both of them are in the same room.

During a lull in the proceedings, I interview a handful of newspeople. I ask if coverage of this campaign is different from previous ones,

whether the tail is wagging the dog, and so forth. Right afterwards, a stringer for *The New York Times* and *The Washington Times* (go figure) interviews me about the news media in New Hampshire. It's a small world.

And a congenial one too — until a candidate or spinster surfaces. Then it's rugby journalism. I got swept into one scrum at a Bill Bradley event in which the camera crews seemed genuinely annoyed that I remained vertical.

SCENE 2: A crew exits a Manchester restaurant just as a young couple is going in. "Are there any candidates in there?" the couple asks. "Because if there are, we're going somewhere else."

SCENE 3: Documentary filmmaker Michael Moore at the McCain victory party is at his dismissive best: "McCain, he's got the best caterer — and a well-fed press always tells the truth."

JACK GERMOND The Baltimore Sun

For his 72nd birthday the veteran political reporter's wife Alice threw him a surprise birthday party in — where else? — the Wayfarer Inn in New Hampshire.

All the usual suspects were there — Novak and Broder and Paul West, Wilke, Russert, Brokaw — all the people who ordinarily cover these things.

New Hampshire is physically easier. You cover New Hampshire and you establish yourself in one hotel and everything is within an hour and a half. Also it's easy because the campaigning is very intense. There are a lot of sources. People I've been dealing with since 1964. And new people who became relevant.

New Hampshire got so damned enormous that it changed. It was kind of a quadrennial summer camp, but now huge mobs of people are

out there covering it. The real trick is to go up earlier, before the mob arrives. Before Japanese broadcasting and the people from the *China Post*. Early in the game it is sort of fun.

New Hampshire used to be the place where the first cut was made. The results established a pecking order which later applied. It's gotten to the point — because the campaign starts so early — that it's now the semifinals. It's gained in importance.

After the election, I'm not going to write a column five days a week. I want to spend more time at the racetrack. It's about time I quit. But near the end of the campaign I usually go up to New Hampshire and do a piece about how the campaign has changed along the way. Things change. People who were fighting become allies, people who were allies are split. The concerns are different. I'll probably get up there again, to New Hampshire.

ENDGAME IN DETROIT

It's almost over, finally. After four and a half years, negotiators hope to soon settle the strike that bled the *Detroit News* and the *Detroit Free Press* and disrupted hundreds of working families. According to people on both sides who are familiar with the talks, all signs point to a deal before May 4, when a Washington, D.C., federal appeals court is scheduled to hear arguments on what caused the strike.

For both sides, the time has come to cut losses. For the newspapers, that almost certainly means staying out of the courtroom. Here's why: after the May 4 hearing, the appeals court would decide whether the papers caused the strike through bad-faith bargaining, as the National Labor Relations Board has already ruled. The court seems likely to agree with the NLRB, since in 1997 it ruled against a 'merit pay' plan that The McClatchy Company had imposed on some of its reporters and editors in very much the same way Detroit newspapers did prior to the strike. Technically, the papers could appeal to the Supreme Court but officials admit the odds of winning look high.

And the cost of losing in court would also be high. The papers would owe at least \$100 million in back wages and benefits since February 1997, when the strikers offered to come back. They would also face an order to reinstate the jobs of several hundred strikers. By negotiating with the unions, the papers hope to bring those numbers down.

With a settlement, newspaper executives also believe they can recover at least a third of the circulation lost during the strike to pro-union subscribers who cancelled. In the six months ending September 30, the *News* and *Free Press* had a combined audited weekday circulation of 597,579. That's down from 888,719 when the strike began. The papers only recently returned to pre-strike profitability trends. They're nowhere near making up the \$300 million in losses and missed profits from the strike itself.

The unions, too, face pressure to settle, particularly the lead union, the Teamsters, whose president, James Hoffa, faces cash-flow



BRUCE CATIN

Years after strikers cast these shadows, serious bargaining has begun

and strategic problems of his own. At the newspapers he is continuing to hand out strike paychecks of \$160 each week. He faces the threat of a \$200 million damage claim in the newspapers' racketeering lawsuit for picket-line violence.

From the other direction he faces pressure from hardened activists who want the newspapers to capitulate, not compromise. And some aspects of the emerging settlement are bound to be unpopular with strikers. For one thing, the newspapers will resist rehiring workers who in their view engaged in "egregious" misconduct. They'll insist on new work rules. And they'll insist on employing a total of about

2,500 workers, as they do now, compared to about 3,300 prior to the strike.

That last point raises a key problem. The papers promised never to lay off the replacement workers who helped them continue publishing during the strike. To make room for returning strikers — just how many will want to come back is unclear — the papers will offer a hefty package of buyouts and early retirements. In January, for the first time, the two sides started the tough bargaining over how much these buyouts and retirements will cost.

— John Lippert

John Lippert, the *Detroit Free Press* labor writer when the strike began, is an automotive writer for Bloomberg News.

THE ONION, MISUNDERSTOOD

A few years ago, *The Onion* (www.theonion.com), the satirical newspaper and Web site that calls itself "America's finest news source," ran one of its typical spoofs, CHINESE WOMAN GIVES BIRTH TO SEPTUAGINTS: HAS ONE WEEK TO CHOOSE. The article went on to explain that the six other babies would be tossed from a mountain top, "in accordance with Chinese multiple-birth law." Immediately, some readers wrote to say they had started Christian prayer groups for

the children. Others offered to adopt.

Snicker all you want, but journalists aren't immune to *The Onion's* motto: "You are dumb."

Take *The Times of London*. In one of its many faux-news stories, *The Onion* reported that the Drug Enforcement Agency had found that WINNERS OCCASIONALLY USE DRUGS. According to the "study," "71 percent of winners have at one time or another experimented with controlled substances." The article went on to say that the DEA had ordered the recall of 150,000

the ONION®
Volume 36 Issue 4 | America's Finest News Source | 9 February 2000

video games displaying a drugs-are-for-losers message.

The Times bit. In a lengthy feature on the UK's drug policy, the venerable paper cited the 71 percent figure, saying the "winners" included "successful business executives, lawyers, scientists, and civic leaders" — all lifted from *The Onion* article, sans attribution.

Then there's *Forbes FYI*, a quarterly supplement to *Forbes* magazine. The magazine features a section in which it culls unintentionally funny headlines from across the country. So *Forbes FYI* editors must have been excit-

ed when they came across NEIGHBORS REMEMBER SERIAL KILLER AS SERIAL KILLER. *Forbes FYI* ran the full article, including a "Peg Appleton" reflecting on her homicidal neighbor: "I didn't know him that well, but he really seemed to hate nurses, the way he was always dismembering them with power tools."

So did *Forbes FYI* editors know they were posting a spoof? "We were fooled," says Thomas Jackson, an associate editor, adding "It must have come via the Internet."

— Eric Umansky
Umansky is a writer based in San Francisco.

The police couldn't contain the violent protests aimed at the World Trade Organization, but the Seattle Post-Intelligencer covered it from every angle.

While the Seattle Police Department found itself totally unprepared for the raucous protests that turned city streets to bedlam, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer staff was up to the challenge. Reporters and photographers brought the story of street demonstrations-turned-riots to readers in dramatic fashion. Post-Intelligencer stories and photographs showed what it was like for protesters, delegates and just ordinary people whose lives were disrupted by the chaos.



At the same time, another team of reporters focused on policy issues, including the geopolitical

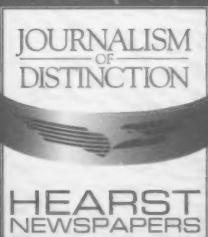
turmoil surrounding the event itself and the global economic, trade and labor issues at stake. The newspaper's

Washington correspondent had an exclusive interview with President Clinton. It was in this interview that the President made remarks which sowed the seeds of the eventual failure of the talks.

No other news organization captured the significance, the color and drama of the events – expected and unexpected – as well as the Post-Intelligencer. By delivering comprehensive cover-

age of events that shake the community and the world, Hearst Newspapers enrich readers' lives every day. ■

See more Journalism of Distinction on the web at www.seattlep-i.com



HEARST: WHERE JOURNALISM OF DISTINCTION IS AN EVERYDAY STORY

DARTS & . . .

HEAVY LIFTING

Mesmerized viewers of *20/20*'s dramatic documentary "In Search of Justice: The Unsolved Civil Rights Murders" (November 29) had little reason to doubt that what they were watching was original journalism at its enterprising best. After all, as it traced the history of five brutal deaths in the 1960s at the hands of southern racists who continue "to live free," the hour-long program immodestly reminded viewers of what the "ABC News investigative team" had "uncovered" in its "explosive . . . investigation" and boasted that the "suspected killer" who was "face to face" with Connie Chung was speaking about the crime "for the first time in thirty-five years." The program ended with co-anchor Jack Ford advising viewers, "If you want to learn more about the stories we brought you tonight you can go to our Web site at ABCnews.com." He might more graciously have directed them to *Newsday*'s "Their Killers Walk Free," a prodigious investigation by staff correspondent Stephanie Saul (December 13-20, 1998; CIR Laurel, May/June 1999) of those five unsolved murders — including her interview with that same "suspected killer" — that had obviously served the *20/20* project as an unacknowledged map. (Of course, the unsolved-murders story deserves all the advancement it can get, and *20/20* deserves praise for its part. But so do *Newsday*, the *Clarion-Ledger* of Jackson, Mississippi, and, most notably, the seminal work done by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which was also unacknowledged by *20/20*. All have been of inestimable value in exposing the facts to the public and — more important — to prosecutors in the South.)

ILLEGAL NEWS?

So intent was a local news director on not letting his station be manipulated into serving as a vehicle for manipulation that he manipulated himself headlong into a journalistic pot-hole. In the face of protests against unfair trade practices, lost jobs, and environmental hazards expected to take place at the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle last fall, KOMO's Joe Barnes announced in an on-air editorial that the station would "not devote coverage to irresponsible or illegal activities of disruptive groups"; KOMO was "taking a stand," he self-righteously explained, "on not

giving some protest groups the publicity they want . . . So if you see us doing a story on a disruption, but we don't name the group or the cause, you'll know why." Challenges and ridicule from other journalists — no who or why on the Boston Tea Party, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks? wondered the Seattle dailies — were to little avail; Barnes's edict stood.

HOME GROWN

PLANTS

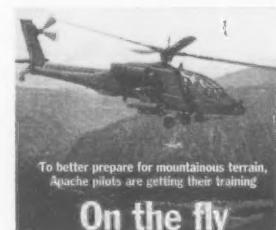
If happiness for a p.r. professional means having a warm relationship with the big-city

MILITARY MEDIA MANEUVERS - PART I

The November/December issue of *Armor* magazine, the professional journal of the armor division of the U.S. Army, was already printed and waiting for binding when the recently installed commander of the Armor Center and School at Fort Knox, Kentucky (and *Armor*'s new publisher), Major General B. B. Bell, issued an extraordinary marching order: recall all 10,000 copies for further editing by him. It seems that Lt. Gen. William Steele, commander at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, had got wind that the issue contained a ten-page article, written by retired Brig. Gen. John Kirk and cleared for publication by *Armor* editor Dave Daigle, that was sharply critical of army policy. As quoted in *Army Times*, which exposed the incident in its December 6 edition, Steele told Bell he "needed to make sure that the right information got out." Among the "wrong information" presented by Kirk and Daigle and deleted (with no apparent irony) by Bell: "Until we live unyielding integrity full-time, popular or not, and quit penalizing candor, we won't have this essential readiness component of American forces."

MILITARY MEDIA MANEUVERS - PART II

In a separate incident, *Stars and Stripes*, the daily "hometown" newspaper for the U.S. armed forces overseas, featured on its November 3 front page this seven-by-six-inch 4-color photo of an Apache helicopter flying, as the headline put it, over "mountainous terrain." The inside story focused on an upcoming, one-time-only day of exercises in the Bavarian Alps for aircrews whose previous training on open desert left them dangerously unprepared to navigate the jagged peaks of the Balkans. Nothing in the page-one image nor in the page-three story — only a tiny cryptic line on an unrelated page — even suggested that the photo was a phony, a creation of S&S's central office in Washington, D.C., which through the magic of modern technology had combined a picture of an Apache with a shot of an awesome mountain view.



To better prepare for mountainous terrain, Apache pilots are getting their training

On the fly

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD LEACH/ STARS AND STRIPES

paper, Cynthia Moxley must be in paradise. Not only is the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* a major client of her Moxley Carmichael public relations firm, but her weekly gossip column, "Strollings," appears every Monday in the paper. Although the "special

to the *News-Sentinel*" feature carries her byline, it offers no hint of what's really behind those breathless plugs for, among other organizations she represents, the TVA, the Knoxville Utilities Board, and the First Tennessee Bank.

... LAURELS

PERSONNEL MATTERS

When a big-city daily decides to keep pertinent information under its hat, the local alternative paper can sometimes provide the needed blast of air. That's what happened last fall in the Windy City, where an unfamiliar byline — namely, that of one Steven Milloy — began to appear on the business pages of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Since Milloy's September 17 news report on a controversial pesticide (STUDY: WEED KILLER OK) added no identification to the writer's byline, and since his November 4 news report on controversial research on the toxic effects of genetically engineered crops on monarch butterflies (STUDY EASES GENE-ALTERED CORN FEARS) indicated only that Milloy was "a Washington-based business writer specializing in science [who] holds advanced degrees . . .," the weekly *Reader* rose to the occasion and completed the introduction. Spelling out Milloy's credentials — formerly an industry lobbyist; currently passionate master of a "junk-science" Web site and organizer of an amicus brief for a risk-assessment case he refuses to discuss — and comparing Milloy's reassuring corn-study story with the same day's story in *The New York Times* (NO CONSENSUS ON THE EFFECTS OF ALTERED CORN ON BUTTERFLIES, was the *Times*'s less sanguine assessment), *Reader* media critic Michael Miner persuasively concluded that Milloy "is no simple journalist. He's a player." Milloy's next effort for the paper — FDA LABEL RULE LACKS SCIENTIFIC BASIS — was labeled "Commentary."

REPORTERS SAY THE DARNEDEST THINGS!

Al Gore's November 30 visit to a media literacy class at a Concord, New Hampshire, high school turned out to be more instructive than might reasonably have been expected. So attentive were the students to the vice president's remarks that when they read the next day's press accounts of his campaign stop at their school they refused to believe their eyes — and went on to set the record straight. Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, for example, reporting that Gore had characteristically claimed credit for drawing public attention to toxic contamination at Love Canal, quoted him as telling the students, "I was the one that started it all"; but, in fact — as the kids were able to show with a transcript of their videotape — he had actually said something quite different. Aiming to inspire his audience with the virtues of active citizenship, Gore had recalled that when he was in Congress, a teenager had written to him about a hazardous waste site in Toone, Tennessee, a site that became the focus of hearings he held on Love Canal as well as on Toone. "But that was the one that started it all," Gore had said. "And it all happened because one high school student got involved." By the time corrections appeared in the *Times* and *Post*, the misleading misquote had already become fodder for Letterman, *Hardball*, and ABC's *This Week*. One can only hope that the disillusioning experience of the Concord students hasn't turned them away from journalism forever. The business sure could use them.

JOURNALISTIC FIELD DAY

Women's sports can claim two new champions, both of them male — Mike Fish and David Milliron, staff writers for *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Their muscular investigation of gender equity in Georgia high schools exposed a pattern of flagrant disregard for the federal law known as Title IX, which since 1972 has mandated comparable financial support for boys' and girls' school athletics programs. Tracking participation levels, funding, quality of facilities, and coaching assistance, the eight-part series ("The Gender Gap," December 12-19) documented the many ways the "institutionalized unfairness" — perpetuated by the combined interests of the state legislature and the powerful, football-mad Georgia High School Association — has been shortchanging girls (not the least of which is in losing out on women's athletic scholarships to college). As the report made clear, a system that provides a spiffy stadium for boys basketball competition while allotting a makeshift gym to the girls; that throws high-pitched salary supplements to the boys' coaches while tossing a pittance to the girls'; and that shamelessly manipulates its record by counting cheerleading as a sport — such a system needs to be fixed. By series end, two women legislators had announced their intention to introduce a state gender-equity bill that would do just that.

FACTS OF D.C. LIFE

Few of the afflicted in the District of Columbia are more in need of protection than the mentally retarded. And few of the district's programs for serving that need met with more enthusiasm than the system of publicly funded, privately operated group homes that replaced the notorious Forest Haven asylum in 1991. Now, with almost a decade of experience behind it, how's the reformed system — one of the costliest in the nation — doing? Disturbingly, a *Washington Post* investigation by staff writer Katherine Boo early last year (March 14-15, 1999) uncovered a significant number of incidents of abuse, neglect, and molestation as well as exploitation, profiteering, and unexamined deaths. Drawing on tens of thousands of documents (many of them expunged) obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, as well on interviews with caretakers, residents, administrators, operators, lawyers, and advocates, Boo's March report concluded with city agencies promising to improve. Nine months later, Boo went back for another look. Her follow-up front-page story (Sunday, December 5) told an even-grimmer tale of troubling deaths, shredded records, and cover-ups.

The Darts & Laurels column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.

'This is the World We Live In'

Coping With Mega-Mergers

BY NEIL HICKEY

Walter Isaacson awoke early at his home in Bronxville, New York, fifteen miles north of Manhattan in Westchester County. Idly, the editor of *Time* flipped on an all-news radio station. That's when he learned that his seventy-seven-year-old magazine, and indeed all of Time Warner — the world's biggest media company — was being enfolded in the embrace of fifteen-year-old America Online, the arriviste 22-million-subscriber gateway to the Internet. *Fortune*'s top editor, John Huey, got the word around the same time: he overheard a fellow passenger's amazed reaction to the story on a plane between Atlanta and New York. Henry Luce III, son of *Time*'s founder, was driving in to New York that morning when a friend imparted the astounding news in a cell phone call. Hours earlier, at about 3 A.M., *The Wall Street Journal* had moved the story on its Dow Jones wires and onto its Web site, and before dawn, *WSJ* reporter Kara Swisher was on CNBC (competitor to Time Warner's own CNNfn) giving early-rising cable-watchers their first whiff of one of the most startling media stories in U.S. history.

At about 7 P.M. on the evening before, Norman Pearlstine, editor in chief of Time Inc.'s thirty-three magazines (plus book clubs, book publishing, Internet sites, direct marketing) had heard about the impending corporate nuptials for the first time. "My initial reaction was to be pissed off that the news hadn't broken on a Thursday, because we had closed *Fortune* on Friday night and *Time* on Saturday night." He didn't alert Isaacson, Huey, or any of his other editors. "When I got the news, the management of both companies had reached an agreement in

principle, but it had not yet been put to a vote of either board. Having no magazine to put out for another two or three days, I treated the story as something I was told on a confidential basis. My instinct was to keep it to myself at that point. If *Time* went to press on a Sunday night, I would have reacted differently."

Astonishingly, no hint of the deal had reached the public ahead of that formal announcement on January 10, even though AOL boss Steve Case and Time Warner chief

Gerald Levin had been meeting and talking about it for months; and dozens of executives, lawyers, and brokers (from Salomon Smith Barney, and Morgan Stanley Dean Witter) had worked vigorously to thrash out the details. Legions of business reporters at Time Inc., CNN, and CNNfn were not favored with any advance, inside information — and couldn't have used it anyway without inviting the curiosity of federal regulators for possible stock tampering.

And so began on January 11 in the world's newspapers, magazines, and electronic media a panoramic effort to root out "what this deal is really all about." Journalists groped for phrases to epitomize it: "The triumph of the Internet as an irresistible force"; "The prototype for a twenty-first century media colossus"; "The beginning of the end of the old mass media"; "Stunning! Wow! Bingo!"; "A gripping transitional moment in history"; "The death of old media"; "One of those events that have the potential to change the competitive landscape so fundamentally that nothing can be the same again." *The Wall Street Journal* expressed its astonishment that a company "not old enough to buy beer" had essentially swallowed a mature media conglomerate that took most of a century to construct. *The Economist* offered an uncharacteristic, garish movie-poster cover: "AOL Time Warner presents: THE BIG LEAP . . . WHEN NEW



TIME WARNER

DOWN
TIME
WARNER
AOL's Steve Case
Time Warner's Jerry Levin
How the AOL-Time Warner merger happened
What it means to consumers
Does it make any sense?
2151
2152

A black and white photograph of a book cover. The title 'How the AOL-Time Warner merger happened' is at the top. Below it are the names 'Steve Case' and 'Jerry Levin'. The subtitle 'What it means to consumers' and 'Does it make any sense?' are at the bottom. The authors' names are also at the bottom. The book is tilted slightly to the left.

MEDIA COMES OF AGE . . . The most talked about deal in history!" Steve Case contributed to the hip-hooray and ballyhoo: "This is a historic moment in which new media has truly come of age . . . We are going to be the global company for the Internet age . . . This will be the Internet Century . . ."

In simplest terms, AOL and Time Warner had thrown each other a life preserver in the effort to grow rationally in the new millennium. One of them needed more products on its shelves to increase its appeal to customers, and the other needed (after failed, fumbling attempts to construct it) a thruway to those millions of online eyeballs. Between them they could eventually offer fast, virtually instantaneous hook-up to the Internet over upgraded cable lines, and thus sell more of everything than either could alone. And they'd be poised to offer the folks at home television, telephone, and Internet service in one package with one handy monthly bill.

Very quickly and inevitably, the word "journalism" popped up, and another round of hand-wringing began over the profession's plight. It all started fifteen years ago with the first great round of mergers that saw NBC News absorbed by GE, ABC News devoured by Disney, CBS News subsumed into Viacom, Time Inc. wedded to Warner Brothers, and CNN ingested by Time Warner.

It was déjà vu all over again, as consumerists, academics, and journalists browsed on the familiar questions: Will three or four gigantic companies soon control all media? Are news people losing their independence and being drowned in the tidal wave of consolidations? Is public confidence in the press being eroded as journalists are suspected of downplaying bad news about their owners and cheerleading for the good news? Is the invisible cancer of self-censorship metastasizing in journalism's bones?

Levin had anticipated all such conundrums because he'd faced them in 1990 when Time Inc. joined Warner Brothers. He informed Case in their earliest merger talks that the editorial independence of Time Inc. and CNN was an essential ingredient of the deal. "My DNA is related to the practice of first-rate independent journalism," he told Jim Lehrer on *The NewsHour* when he and Case appeared together on January 12. "The whole history of taking Time Inc. into its current state, and now with AOL, has been designed to protect and enhance the journalistic independence of our company."

To that, Case offered his view that "it's important to really empower journalists to do their job, and the whole thing unravels if there is any question about that." The new AOL/Time Warner would almost surely get tougher coverage from in-house journalists than from outsiders, he insisted. They will "bend over backwards" and be more "negative" in covering the parent company. "This is not about trying to have some influence over all these media properties for some kind of self-serving reason."

But no amount of such fervent assurances has been sufficient to allay the fears of news theorists and practitioners who recall such mischief as Disney killing an embarrassing ABC |



MICK STEVENS/THE NEW YORKER COLLECTION

News report about hiring practices at Disney World. (Or Michael Eisner's memorable, worrisome remark: "I would prefer ABC not cover Disney. I think it's inappropriate for Disney to cover Disney.") Or Rupert Murdoch's expunging the BBC from his Asian satellite service to curry favor with the Chinese. Or CNN, during the debate over the 1996 Telecommunications Act, refusing to run phone companies' commercials that claimed cable rates would zoom if the bill passed.

Time Inc.'s Pearlstine spends as much time thinking about such issues as anybody in the profession. The marriage with AOL is "incremental, rather than some great sea change," he feels. "We survived the merger with Warner. We survived the merger with Turner. So I don't see any real downsides in terms of coverage — just more of it." Three years ago, he rewrote his own job description to state that part of his mandate is to cover his own division and the rest of Time Warner in equitable fashion. "I think we're actually pretty good now at being critical of ourselves. We're sort of past that." The trickier task, he thinks, is to publish a legitimate, laudatory piece about some aspect of AOL/Time Warner's business. When some good-news story about the company breaks, "will we have the self-confidence to write it," he asks, "knowing that the *Columbia Journalism Review* will be jumping all over us for touting our corporate parent? My hope is that the answer to that is yes." Time recently published a cover on the *Pokémon* phenomenon while Warner Bros. was releasing *Pokémon: The First Movie*. Pearlstine claims that not to have put *Pokémon* on the cover "would have been strange, given how ubiquitous the stuff is," even though the article was one more example, among several, of Time Inc. bestowing cover stories on Time Warner products such as Stanley Kubrick's film *Eyes Wide Shut*.

The Time Inc. sibling most intimately affected by formation



'The merger intensifies the impression that all media are part of one big octopus-like conglomerate. And it's another step toward people thinking that media companies are judged strictly on whether they can draw an audience. Both of those things are at odds with good, independent journalism. However, I view the merger as a symbolic and marginal step rather than a dramatic step in that direction. It was a much clearer step when *Time* merged with Warner Brothers. And, in fairness, *Time* has remained the strongest of the news magazines.' — James Fallows

ANDREW KOHUT

Food For Public Distrust

BY ANDREW KOHUT

The acquisition of news media companies by diversified corporations and their possible future marriages to Internet companies loom as troubling components of public distrust of the media.

This is despite the fact that less than half (45 percent) of the public took notice of the proposed AOL-Time Warner merger, according to the Pew Research Center news interest survey.

The public has a long-standing suspicion that news organizations are not as independent of outside interests as they claim. I first learned this while conducting focus groups in the mid-1980s about the then newly-minted "credibility crisis." Our roundtable respondents forcefully told us that the news media were often influenced, if not pushed around, by powerful people and organizations. Having spent years listening to politicians and business leaders complain about an over-adversarial media, I chalked this up to the vagaries of the groups we had gathered for our in-depth discussions. But the results of subsequent nationwide surveys bore out what we found in the focus groups. Most Americans in our representative survey at that time believed the press was "often" influenced by power structures — 65 percent thought advertisers influenced the press, 70 percent cited business, and 73 percent even described the federal government as often bossing the press around.

That was more than fifteen years ago and the public has gotten more, not less distrustful of the press. Opinion may worsen when it dawns on the public that many of America's top news organizations are small cogs in giant corporate wheels. For now, it's largely below the public's radar. Only 37 percent of respondents in a Pew nationwide survey conducted last December knew that General Electric owned broadcast outlets. This was almost the same percentage that knew Dow Jones owned a news organization. Curiously, a much higher 60 percent identified Disney as a news media owner. Whether that reflected knowledge of the ABC link, or a readily



Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, writes regularly for CJR about public attitudes toward the media.

implicit association between the news media and the world of fantasy, was not clear from the survey results.

Even without making the big corporate connections, many Americans today think the press is too concerned with the interests of the companies that own them, and the interests of their advertisers as well. Fully 42 percent of Pew's respondents in December described protecting the business interests of owners as a major problem with news organizations these days. And 35 percent said the same about protecting the interests of advertisers.

PROBLEMS WITH THE NEWS MEDIA

MAJOR PROBLEM %

Too focused on misdeeds of public figures	59
Sensationalism	49
Protecting owners' business interests	42
Inaccurate reporting	41
Overly critical reporting	35
Protecting advertisers' interests	35

Wealthier and older Americans are more alarmed about this than the young. Fifty percent of those sixty-five and older think the media are too concerned with owners' business interests compared with 36 percent among younger adults. Older respondents are also more concerned than the young

about whether the media are too aware of advertiser interests.

This same survey found that many people worry that the press may be a lap dog, rather than a watchdog, when bosses' interests are involved. Still, the top complaint about the press was: it is overly focused on reporting the misdeeds and personal failings of public figures (see box). In other words, the public faults the press for being too much of a watchdog when it comes to the pols, but suspects it may turn a blind eye to problems when its owners' corporate interests are at stake. More episodes like Times Mirror's involvement with the Staples Center, and a growing recognition that those who assign and report the news are little fish in big corporate seas, can only stir up long-standing doubts about the press's independence.

Journalists themselves are worried about this. Nearly three-quarters of journalists employed by national news organizations said that buyouts by diversified corporations are having a negative effect on journalism today. Concerns about corporate ownership at this point are mostly about financial pressure, not conflicts of interest. Almost half said that increased bottom-line pressure is hurting the quality of news coverage. On the other hand, an even larger majority of national journalists — 68 percent — said corporate owners have little or no influence on what stories they cover or emphasize, and 77 percent consider advertisers to have virtually no say in stories they pursue. But the single biggest concern of journalists these days — the credibility crisis — could worsen given the public's doubts about these claims. ■

MORE MONEY, MORE INTEREST ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	UNDER \$30,000	\$30,000 \$49,999	\$50,000 \$74,999	\$75,000+ ABOVE
% FOLLOWING THE MERGER				
Very/Fairly Closely	36	41	54	64
Not Too/Not At All Closely	61	58	46	36



COREEN SIMPSON

'For people of color and people with non-traditionalist ideas, the merger is a bad thing. I have no reason to think they are going to reflect the ideas of those who dissent. We hear it all the time: "Oh, we're not going to mess with news content." Then we begin to hear the subtextual rumblings of media censorship, where it's not so easy for ABC News to cover Disney anymore. In terms of information, the merger is not a good sign. It pushes other companies to seek similar deals, which shrinks the landscape even more.'

— Jill Nelson, columnist, MSNBC.com

of the new, extended family is *Fortune*, since a huge percentage of its articles are about some AOL/Time Warner ally or competitor, or relate in some marginal or crucial way to the parent's interests. *Fortune* media columnist Marc Gunther, speaking shortly after the merger announcement, said that his experience at the magazine so far has been "exemplary," but he's concerned about public perception, both past and future. He was finishing up an AOL piece "which continues to reflect my belief that they're a really good company run by smart people. I'm sure there will be readers who'll say, 'He's a shill for the parent company,' and that bothers me. No matter how well you run these publications, people are going to be suspicious, and I don't know if there's anything that any of us can do about that."

Similarly, The CNN News Group's portfolio requires that it cover media and dot-commerce for its 76 million U.S. subscribers and more than a billion people in 212 countries and territories. What does the new alignment mean for CNN journalism? "I haven't a clue," says Jeff Greenfield, the network's senior political analyst and veteran media observer. But he doesn't share the alarm of some critics. Bad journalism doesn't turn on who owns you, he thinks. "In some ways, big is an advantage to journalistic independence." A small town editor who attacks his publisher's pal, the mayor, can be in deep trouble, whereas big media can often tweak the powerful, and be resilient enough to withstand retribution.

Nonetheless, the biggest dilemma that such giant mergers pose for journalists, Greenfield confesses, is that by definition they enlarge the likelihood of corporate tinkering. As a company's universe expands, so does the risk of embarrassment from information reaching the public that might harm profitability or image. "I absolutely agree that bigger aggregates of corporate size increase the potential for conflict of interest. OK — now you've said that, now what?" The only course then is to keep a keen eye out for corporate interference. "If AOL/Time Warner starts mucking around with the editorial decisions of CNN, a lot of us would say, 'No thank you, we're not sticking around.'" Two clichés apply, Greenfield says: "The proof is in the pudding," and "By their fruits you shall know them."

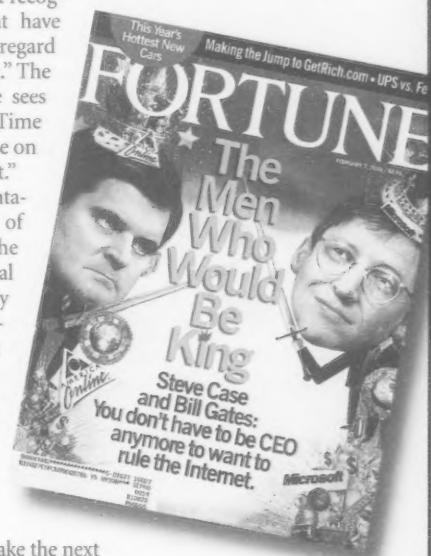
Journalism is expensive — not nearly so profitable as entertainment. The argument can be made, says media theorist

Esther Dyson, that the bigger the company the more money for its journalists to do their jobs. "I don't think this merger changes things much. It recognizes the changes that have already occurred with regard to how the media work." The only real positives she sees for journalism is that Time Warner "gets a new lease on life — more excitement."

But bigness is a contagion in the new age of mega-media, and the AOL/Time Warner deal makes more likely another round of consolidations, and yet more head-shaking about the plight of journalists trapped in ever more mammoth corporate edifices. Disney, Viacom, GE, News Corp., Sony, Bertelsmann? Who'll make the next defensive move? What surprises might we expect from Gannett, Times Mirror, Dow Jones? When the dust clears in a few years, will a handful of companies dominate an integrated, global commercial communications market?

More immediately: Will AOL/Time Warner allow other, smaller Internet service providers nondiscriminatory open access to its system (as most media experts are demanding), thereby helping assure a diversity of voices? Or will it use its size and ubiquity for unfair advantage? (The company claims it will take the high road, without bureaucrats forcing it to do so.)

Still, AOL subscribers may expect in the future — not surprisingly — to see Time Inc. businesses appear more prominently than ever on their computer screens: *People*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Parenting*, *Cooking Light*, *Progressive Farmer*, *Southern Living*, *In-Style*, the Book-of-the-Month Club, CNN, CNN.com. Subscription offers for Time Inc. magazines will



'The question with all such deals is whether the personalities involved are dedicated to the principles of good journalism, or susceptible to popular trends that might erode sound journalistic practice. Bigness is not a problem if the resources are used in a proper way. But we see things like the owners of big media companies using their local stations' news broadcasts to promote their films and interview the stars. It's this slow, almost unnoticed deterioration of our standards in all areas of journalism that permits us to overlook these things.'

— Walter Cronkite

proliferate. All manner of Time Warner/AOL-related options and branded services will pop into view onscreen, expects Consumer Union's Gene Kimmelman. "It's giving you a nudge to use their products and services, and to get your information from their journalists." But the merger could be a net gain for consumers, if it isn't allowed to stifle full development of the Internet, he says. "If competitors have fair use of AOL/Time Warner's transmission system, I think there's certainly an opportunity for offering more benefits of innovation."

Making the incipient AOL/Time Warner synergy real will place additional pressures on Time Inc. and CNN journalists to raise profits, according to Robert W. McChesney, professor of communications at the University of Illinois and author of *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. The corporate chiefs "won't have time to horse around worrying about whether CJR thinks they're breaching some journalistic code. They've got to make serious coin." AOL has assured investors that the new mega-company in its first year will add an extra billion dollars in pre-tax operating profits. To meet a goal like that, will AOL/Time Warner hand advertisers and marketers a far more significant role in the planning and presentation of editorial product? Most online banner ads aren't highly efficient, so publishers may find new ways of melding advertising with editorial in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

"There are editorial people of great integrity who will resist that, but there will be others who'll go with the flow," says McChesney. Thus, the firewall debate gains new currency with the AOL/Time Warner deal and others certain to follow. Several experts CJR talked to feel that economic pressures on newsrooms everywhere will be more relentless than ever in the years ahead. Each new amalgamation puts a heavier burden on journalism to perform as a conventional business, says Marvin Kalb, executive director of the Shorenstein Center's Washington office. But newsgathering may not make money, even as it delivers a necessary product for the American people. "There's going to be less tolerance of that in an organization as large as AOL/Time Warner." Ray Cave, former editor of *Time*, says he's not sympathetic with journalists "moaning and complaining" about these deals. "I think the real responsibility of journalists is to realize: this is the world we now live in." And then: how to do the best possible job in circumstances that are not ideal, but which are inescapable.

At the heart of the AOL/Time Warner concordat and the issues it raises for journalism is the explosive evolution of the Internet. As recently as 1990, most Americans hadn't heard of it. Now, 200 million people worldwide are online and that number will reach a billion in the next half-dozen years. The World Wide Web was virtually unknown until 1995. That same year, Bill Gates in a famous internal memo ordered his executives to make the Internet the focus of Microsoft's planning for the road ahead to the new millennium. Most of the



"I KNEW THERE'D BE A DOWNSIDE TO THE AOL-TIME WARNER MERGER..."

REXBABIN/JOHNSON/AMERICA SYNDICATE

nation's 1,500 daily newspapers and 18,000 magazines now have Web sites, almost all of which are money-losers so far. National news organizations recognize that a rich, utilitarian online presence is essential to their competitive success. Soon, the gargantuan cable companies like AT&T and AOL/Time Warner will have replaced their puny, low capacity wires with hugely capacious "broadband" pipelines — great aqueducts funneling news and information to homes and businesses in heretofore unimaginable volume and variety.

The building of that priceless infrastructure is inevitably wedging power to power. Many journalists are finding themselves ever smaller potatoes in a larger and larger stew — and looking about, they see fewer stews than ever before on the media cookstove. And yet — information sources have proliferated wildly since the Big Media era began a decade or more ago: national, and local, all-news cable channels and loss-leader all-news Web sites underwritten by media conglomerates. MSNBC and MSNBC.com, for example, owe their young lives to parents GE and Microsoft. *Slate*, a first-rate addition to the national discourse (like *Salon* and comparable Web zines), is another Microsoft offspring. The four-year-old, 24/7 Fox News Channel and *The Weekly Standard* grow out of News Corp.'s rich loam. CNN operates six cable news networks, a gain of two since its absorption into Time Warner. New York 1, Time Warner's local cable channel, airs municipal news, sports, and weather around the clock as do scores of other such services supported by major cable companies.

The bottom line? There are two: Big deals like the AOL/Time Warner union can be a net gain for consumers by bringing them more and better news sources than ever before. And: journalists down in the trenches need to defend their craft and its principles like wildcats whenever Big Daddy's self-interest collides with telling the whole truth.

Beyond that? Well . . . welcome to the Internet Century! ■



'Trying to do new products, for the narrowband world of today or the broadband world of tomorrow, creates interesting opportunities. There may be magazines we do with AOL. Ziff-Davis does *Yahoo Internet Life* with Yahoo. One of the first things that came to my mind was: we can do that. Both *People* and *Teen People* are already exclusively on AOL, so I can imagine that more of our magazines might migrate there, although Case has made it quite clear that, as big as Time Warner is, it's not going to be the sole source of content for AOL. I think you'll see an open system where there will be lots of non-Time Warner content.' — Norman Pearlstine

The Risk Taker

BY MIKE HOYT

Some see the glass as half full and some see it as half empty. Kevin Heldman will point out the detritus floating in the water. He talks softly and rapidly in a gravel voice, assisted by his hands. He uses the thumb and pinkie to shape a telephone receiver when he mentions phone calls, and makes a knock-knock motion when he talks about approaching people's doors. Both come up a lot. At thirty-four, he covers serial murders for APBnews.com, the crime and criminal justice news site, where he is happy as a clam, in a Kevin Heldman sort of way.

The job involves straight news coverage — SUSPECT HELD IN PORTLAND SERIAL KILLING — as well as digging to build and maintain a serial-killer database. This APB feature allows the visitor to click into information on clusters of homicides that appear to be the work of serial murderers (experts believe there are thirty to fifty of them active in the nation at any given time). But what Heldman mostly does is zero in on tales within the world of serial homicide investigation that grab his interest and write magazine-length articles. Full-immersion reporting on dark and significant subjects is what Heldman likes and seems to need to do.

Even on vacation. Last year he went to Japan with his wife, Sumiko Obata, and they spent part of their time there somehow talking their way into Yokosuka prison. Heldman eventually produced an investigation for APB, "Brutality by Design," on the Japanese penal system, a fascinating exposé of a closed institution. One of the disciplinary techniques he covered there was *chobastu*, in which a prisoner is made to sit rigidly on a box — knees together, elbows tucked, hands on thighs — staring at the wall for twelve hours a day, days on end. It weirdly mirrored some-



thing Heldman himself had experienced at age sixteen. His background, in fact, explains some of Kevin Heldman's reportorial intensity.

But we are getting ahead of the story.

The Heldman family had a nice house on Long Island with a sod lawn, but there was trouble behind the door. Heldman repeatedly ran away. Eventu-

ally he was placed in a rehab center in Manhasset. "Ostensibly for drugs," he says, "but these were fifteen- to sixteen-year olds. Nobody there was a serious user. It was just kids acting out."

It was in Manhasset that Heldman experienced American *chobastu*. If you broke a rule, he says, the counselors put you in a wooden chair without a back,

PHOTO BY JADA BARRETT

'I was in the subway tunnels with these guys and they were all doped up, and the train is coming . . . the train is bearing down . . .'

facing a wall where they had taped "a piece of paper with a philosophy, some nonsense. And you'd have to sit like this without moving, from eight A.M. to maybe six or eight P.M. And you know, for a sixteen-year-old hyperactive kid, it was unbearable."

Heldman resisted; life got worse. "I got kicked out," he says, "and put in a wildly more inappropriate place, which was Phoenix House, with real hard-core users, where I really didn't belong." People with serious cocaine habits, heroin in tracks, were there, "adults mixed with teenagers. From all the upstate prisons. It was a real education." He was moved to several Phoenix House locations, ran away again, and finally landed in an upstate branch in a former monastery. There he settled a bit, he says, and eventually became a peer tutor. "A lot of the kids were my age, and were struggling. I miss them sometimes. It's corny, but in that locked environment everything was corny. On my birthday they broke into the staff kitchen and got me little cupcakes, all sitting around the room, these tough kids . . ." Heldman earned a high school diploma through the teachers at Phoenix House.

At eighteen, after a couple of more twists and turns, Heldman went into the army, which he thought was largely "a lot of wasted nonsense." But in the end, he used the G.I. bill to finance college, at the State University of New York at Purchase. After what he had been through, he says, he tended to appreciate college. "I don't have to paint rocks or clean urinals? I just have to go to class at eleven and talk about a book I just read? I worked like a demon." Things were looking up, in a Kevin Heldman sort of way. He had already, in the army, had the tattoo on his right arm altered. He covered the words "Born to Lose" with ribbons and dice and flowers, and substituted "Live By Chance."

Even as a child, Heldman says, he always wanted to write, and over the years produced "boxes" of stories and journals. In his senior year of college he

got a taste of journalism, on a campus newspaper. The piece that first gave him a sense of journalism's power was a descriptive one about the work atmosphere in the college's food-services facility where he washed dishes. Many of the employees were South American immigrants, and Heldman thought management was mistreating and bullying them. So he documented it. On the day the article was published, Heldman recalls, one of the cooks tried to hand him \$100. "All the Hispanic workers were extremely grateful. It was really powerful, the impact that something like that could have. And the director came into the kitchen that day, and he said, 'Kevin, is there anything I can do for you? Do you need more guys?'"

After college, Heldman borrowed money and got himself into Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, where some teachers didn't quite connect with the Heldman oeuvre but others thought they saw something. He graduated in 1991 and tried unsuccessfully to get a newspaper job. Thus began a free-lance career. He wrote about such things as "the social implications of rap music" for prisoners on Riker's Island, for *Us* magazine, and for *Vibe*, a portrait of adolescent penal boot camps. Magazine editors generally are not sitting and waiting for hard reporting on marginalized people, but a few are open to it. Heldman's first big break came in 1995 with *Rolling Stone*, to which he sold a piece about how the graffiti subculture in New York had degenerated "from an alternative art form to an expression of violence and obsession."

On that one, Heldman demonstrated his penchant for throwing himself into the work. He found "JA," a twenty-four-year-old who lives the graffiti life, such as it is, as a kind of anti-authority poem, and who had become the number-one target of the cops on the graffiti beat. Heldman did much of the reporting

before even pitching the idea, climbing through some dark places. "I was in the subway tunnels with those guys and they were doped up, and the train is coming. There's all these places you shouldn't stand, and I didn't know, and I'm asking the guy and the train is bearing down and he's like, 'You've got to understand the philosophy, man; it doesn't matter where you stand; you stand graphically.' And I'm saying 'tell me where the fuck to stand!'"

In December 1994, a group of homeless young teenagers surviving on prostitution and drugs and whatever in a Houston neighborhood called Montrose kidnapped a fellow runaway and tortured him for three days. They bit off part of his nose and set him on fire with lighter fluid, among other vile things. As the case neared trial *Rolling Stone* sent its new writer, who seemed to have such an affinity for lost souls, to write about this group of them. Heldman's September '95 piece, "Welcome to the Jungle," quickly gets to a long description of the kids on the front stoop of the Houston Institute for the Protection of Youth, a drop-in center:

... Others are checking beepers, trying to arrange deals on the inside phone, fielding calls from tricks, boyfriends and parents, talking about going to Astroworld stoned to ride the rides with a head. They're going in and out the door for cups of soda and smashing the empties on the spiked fence outside, fingers too greasy to open another bag of chips . . . They're calling each other bitch, faggot, punk . . . They're saying they need some weed, X, acid; going into the surrounding inner-city wards for crack; reciting Slayer lyrics . . . Bored out of their minds, they Mace one another, urinate on the grounds and play Monopoly with staff members, conspicuously cheating for attention . . .

Without diminishing the evil of what some of them had done, even highlighting it, Heldman somehow evokes the

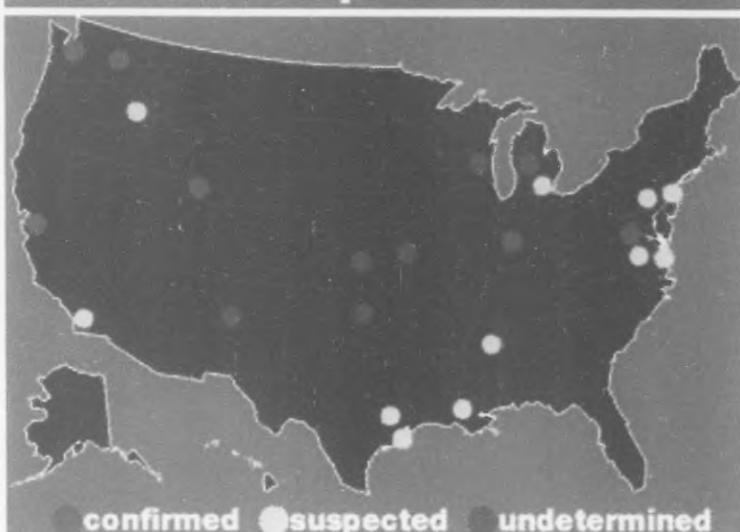
humanity of the runaways as well as the self-loathing that surely fueled the crime. It is clear from the piece that they let Heldman into their troubled solar system, spoke to him as an elder statesman who had once logged some orbits there.

By his own admission, Heldman can be difficult to edit. He's not at all a sour person, and straightforward, easy to talk to. But he often feels that he must "advocate," as he puts it, for a piece. Robert Love, *Rolling Stone*'s managing editor, remembers "a tough edit. He wants to do things his own way. He didn't want to use quotations, for example; he wanted to put all the quotes in italics. But we don't do that." Still, Love was drawn to Heldman's "ability to recreate dialogue in a truthful way. He really listened to kids. He really got them. The authenticity of what he was doing was clear."

Heldman broke with *Rolling Stone* after his next piece, which Love recalls as "not up to our standards." It was a bleak piece with a large target — the U.S. Army. Heldman looked at life on Yongsan U.S. Army Garrison, one of many U.S. military bases in South Korea, and at the liquor- and prostitution-fueled purgatory just outside. The picture he drew looked less like the "Be All That You Can Be" commercials than a corner of a Hieronymus Bosch. It included reporting about the low numbers of G.I.s who actually end up using their college benefits, and spoke to a number of soldiers who joined to better themselves and felt wasted. After a series of discouraging rejections, the article eventually ran in *Z* magazine at the end of 1996, and then on a Web site about Korean affairs called *Kimsoft.com*. There it drew more reaction, Heldman says, than any piece he has ever written. He still hears, he says, from G.I.s who read it.

On assignment for *Spin*, Heldman spent two months as a volunteer in a London homeless shelter, exploring the tension of attraction and repulsion at "the intersection of charity and need." But he pulled the piece from *Spin* over editorial difficulties and gave it to *City Limits*, a small, brave urban affairs magazine in New York City. Soon he took a job at the alternative *Dallas Observer*, and moved to Texas. There he produced an eleven-page cover piece about a schizophrenic's long fall through a torn safety net. And was promptly fired over

Serial Killer Map



For APBNews.com, Heldman built up a database on clusters of murders that appear to be the work of serial killers. Visitors click on the dots for a full report.

troubles in the editing. The assigning editor had left the magazine, Heldman explains, and the *Observer* had farmed it out to somebody who he felt didn't understand it. "Some former music critic," he says.

He returned to New York. At 3 A.M. one morning, he walked into the lobby of Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center, in Brooklyn, and told the guard there he was looking for psychiatric help. He was, indeed, mildly depressed over his apparently derailed journalism career. But Heldman was in the hospital on assignment for *City Limits* — to see how ordinary people who need psychiatric aid get treated. He had pitched the idea from Texas. "I had done a lot of reporting. I knew a lot of people who went through the psychiatric system. I had tons of statistics. I knew this world. I mean, if they had treated me with kindness and compassion and decency, I would have written that. I'm not supposed to have my mind made up. But I knew they would treat me like junkie scum."

The understated but quietly ferocious piece that resulted was titled "7 1/2 Days," for the length of time Heldman was held in the facility. During those 179 hours, as the *City Limits* cover lines put it, "his treatment consisted of three hours of group counseling, four hours of dancing and stretching, and 25 minutes with psychiatrists. Total charges, \$8,400." The piece portrays a group of frightened

patients desperate for human contact, trapped in a system that didn't much care.

These days, at APB.com, Heldman worries occasionally about the effect of a steady paycheck on the motors that drive him. "It's easy to lose that empathy," he says. "I feel that it's not as strong as I wish it was nowadays. The further removed I am from Phoenix House . . ." He doesn't finish the sentence, as is sometimes the case with Heldman. "I have money in my pocket. I can pay the bar tabs with credit cards and not care. I have health insurance." He doesn't mention the stock options that APB provides to its employees. "I'm a professional. It's harder to relate to . . . you have to find more and more extreme things to make you . . . you know, it just puts you in a different frame of mind." He smiles, then shrugs. "I guess all I have to do is get fired and start free-lancing again, and I'll be right in there."

Not likely. Heldman's bosses seem quite high on him. He was among their first hires back in October 1998, when APB was basically three men with an idea. One of the three, Mark Sauter, APB's c.o.o., served in Korea in the army infantry, and had read Heldman's piece about army life there back when it came out. He didn't like it, at least at first. "I told Kevin that piece had really pissed me off in some ways," he says. "But I

'If they had treated me with compassion and decency I would have written that . . . But I knew they would treat me like junkie scum.'

realized when I thought about it that one of the reasons it pissed me off is that it was so on the mark," Sauter says. Heldman struck him as "a risk-taker," and since APB.com was trying to build a credible online news operation from scratch in about ninety days, that's the kind of person he thought he needed.

The clip that struck Hoag Levins, executive editor and vice president, was the one in which Heldman turned himself in to a mental hospital, partly because Levins had done something similar earlier in his journalism career and "I had a keen sense of what it takes to do that." Levins says he needed driven reporters. "You follow your instincts. I thought, 'well, he's not your normal kind of guy, but I think he really has it.' And it turned out that he does." Within about forty-eight hours, Heldman had dug up a previously unreported serial murder cluster along I-10 in California, and local TV there was picking up on APB's coverage. Sauter and Levins were ecstatic. Heldman became APB's Serial Killer Bureau.

One piece of work Heldman's editors point to is a big June package with several follow-up stories on what APB christened the "Florida Hog Trail Killings"—a cluster of six grisly murders in an isolated area crisscrossed by wild boar paths, inland from the Gulf Coast. Between 1994 and 1997 six bodies were found within a ten-mile radius, all male, all nude. Two of them were mutilated and three had rope marks. At the time of the story, a man named Daniel Conahan was suspected in several of the killings but had been charged with just one of them. Conahan admitted only to a penchant for bondage.

In a way, Heldman's stories on the murders amounted to a trial before the trial. The articles walked a visitor through the locale of the murders, the trailer parks and gay pickup areas that its victims inhabited, and through the thicket of evidence.

And the package demonstrates the evolving journalistic potential of the

Web. Along with his stories, Heldman was able to post reports and documents from the investigation on APB. He also put up material supplied by the accused killer, including a Details of Investigation report from the sheriff's department that Conahan had annotated —



KEVIN HELDMAN
Staff writer, APBnews.com

AGE: 34

FAMILY: married to Sumiko Obata; no children

EDUCATION: State University of New York, at Purchase; Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism

QUOTE: "I always had an almost religious attachment to journalism. That's the thing that defines my life; so it has to matter."

"lies . . . lies," he wrote in the margin. Conahan was convicted and now waits on death row.

"He has a way with people," Levins says. "Cops talk to him." This is partly because Heldman has learned to talk detective — Was the body disarticulated? Was a VICAP form (Violent

Criminal Apprehension Program) filled out? He gets substantial e-mail from detectives and, of course, tips from readers, some worthless, others maybe not. Heldman spends time checking them out and, occasionally, he passes one along to the police, with permission, although he frets about being a conduit. On the other hand he does not, he says, try to play junior detective.

Heldman can occasionally warm up a cold case. He happened upon one in Elko, Nevada, last year, involving an unidentified body of a woman that had been found in a remote desert area, in October 1996. The body had been found with several intriguing clues, but detectives could not identify the dead woman. After Heldman's visit, they tried once more to match a latent print on a cosmetic case that had been at the scene. This time they got a match, which led them to a mug shot of a woman who had been arrested in Oregon and Texas in the early 1990s, but apparently under a false name. Heldman then posted her mug shot on APB, and a relative of the dead woman subsequently identified her as a troubled mother of three who had been estranged from her family. Evidence from the case was later presented to a regional task force investigating the killings of twelve women in the Great Basin area, although the case has not advanced further.

He likes his strange beat. But "ideally, I'd like to do a wider variety of stories, if it was up to me," Heldman says. "There are other things that interest me — prison stories, terrorism stories, political stories, Japan, whatever. I just propose anything to do with crime."

Except white-collar crime. He's not all that interested in it. "Maybe it's the life and death part. A guy calls me from county jail and says they're gonna move to death row — that's real. It reminds me not to be complacent. It makes me feel like life matters. You know what I mean?" ■

Mike Hoyt (mh151@columbia.edu) is

Covering Crime the Internet Way

BRENT CUNNINGHAM

In the early days, APBnews.com hired its editor in a Starbucks and squeezed into a newsroom so cramped that the fire marshal eventually nudged the start-up out. Those "early days" were just sixteen months ago. Now, APB — the crime news Web site that marries new media with old-school reporting — fills two sprawling floors (one still being renovated) in a building in lower Manhattan, cherry-picks reporters and editors from premiere news organizations, and is hyped as a journalistic pioneer.

And it is. On any given day, for example, APB reporters have nearly 4,000 freedom of information requests prodding bureaucrats from coast to coast. Three staffers, an in-house legal counsel, and a specialized computer program — complete with ticklers to keep track of deadlines — handle this document factory. It has produced thousands of pages of government files on everyone from Richard Nixon to Murray Kempton, an internal Pentagon memo suggesting the Navy pilot believed to be the gulf war's first U.S. casualty may have survived the crash of his plane over Iraq, and a steady stream of less sensational items like indictments and asset-forfeiture files.

With a growing staff of 125 (it will eventually approach 200), APB's new digs are still crowded. Editors and reporters are lined up in rows — no cubicles or offices — just computers side by side, linked by tangles of telephones, paper, and coffee cups. The place has the energy and rhythm of a daily newspaper and the feel of a work in progress.

What APB does is still rare in online journalism: hire real reporters and editors, arm them with the interactive and multimedia muscle of the Internet, and turn them loose. The result is a daily diet of original reporting on crime, safety, and criminal justice stories ranging from virtual bookies cashing in on the Super Bowl to an in-depth look at the nation's aging prison population. They write about anti-crime proposals in the president's state of the union speech, an inmate whose millennial fears caused him to sew his eyes and lips shut with dental floss, and a thief charge at a sheriff's bond fund in Florida.

The screenshot shows the homepage of APBnews.com. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links to 'Crime, Justice, Safety', 'LIVE POLICE SCANNERS', 'FIND YOUR CITY HERE', and a 'GO' button. To the right, there's a sidebar with links to 'NEWS CENTER', 'SAFETY CENTER', 'CRIME SOLVERS', 'MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT', 'CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFILES', 'RESOURCE CENTER', 'CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM', 'VIDEO CENTER', and an 'about' link. The main content area features a large image of a police officer with the text 'TOP STORIES: SUPER BOWL RAP-SHEET'. Below this, there are three news stories with images and titles: 'Country Kids Use More Drugs, Study Says', 'Muggers Take Blind Man's Cane', and 'Congress Zeros in on Lax Border Security'. At the bottom of the main content area, there's a section titled 'ELSEWHERE ON APBnews.com' with three more stories: 'Bratton: HAUNTS', 'NIXON Smoking Gun Tapes', and 'The Voice of Lucy Faces Jail'.

There are short, daily polls, and a regularly updated list of chat-room topics like gun control or racism in the New York City police department. A section of ongoing stories has a mini-archive of APB coverage of things like the hunt for Eric Rudolph, the suspected Olympic park bomber; and the U.S. effort to prosecute Osama bin Laden for the bombings at East African embassies.

Storytelling on the Internet is still evolving, and APB (the name was inspired by the police phrase All Points Bulletin) has an interesting blend of traditional and new media. In coverage of the JonBenet Ramsey murder story, for example, readers get the kind of breaking and analytical coverage found in newspapers and on television. But they also can see the autopsy report, the search warrants, and the ransom note. They can rummage through the "House of Clues,"

where an interactive diagram of the Ramsey's Colorado home leads through the evidence. "We're trying to do experimental journalism that is journalism," says Hoag Levins, who left his job as executive editor of *Editor & Publisher* to run this online newsroom.

APB's pretrial coverage of the Amadou Diallo trial covered much of the same ground as the rest of the media. But APB readers can also take a 360-degree photographic tour of the Bronx vestibule where New York City police gunned down Diallo. They can peruse evidence in unsolved murder cases and discuss them via online chat, view snippets of police video — car chases, drug busts, etc. — packaged with narration like something from the television show *Cops*, and enter their zip code and get a crime-risk assessment of their neighborhood.

"They really are sort of the new wave,"

says Nora Paul, who teaches new media at the Poynter Institute, about APB. "These are solid journalists doing solid journalism."

The idea of a vertical news site that banks on intensity of reader interest isn't new. ESPN does it with sports. The Street.com and others do it with market news. But APB brings it to a less specialized audience.

Marshall Davidson, a former investment banker from Texas, conceived the company as a cable channel. He was joined by partners Mark Sauter, a former investigative reporter, and Matthew Cohen, another investment banker, and together they re-envisioned it for the Internet. APB hasn't struggled for backers. Sauter says a first round of venture capital money (\$3.5 million in August 1998) was followed by a second round of \$20 million last summer from assorted media investors and funds. A third round is on its way. And although Sauter says there is no timetable, APB may go public this year.

Profit continues to elude most online ventures. In an effort to remedy this, Davidson, Sauter, and Cohen have moved well beyond banner ads. "One of the things an analyst told us was essential when we started was to have multiple revenue streams," says Sauter, officially the company's chief operating officer. Toward that end, APB has entered into a mushrooming network of deals. APB stories are syndicated to newspapers and their Web sites through Universal Press Syndicate, to college textbooks through Prentice Hall, to television through CONUS Communications, and to the Web through Snap.com, Yahoo! News, and MSNBC.com. A deal with AOL was inked last month. Part of the renovation currently under way at APB headquarters involves installation of a television studio for another possible deal with a network. E-commerce is coming: in addition to branded stuff like hats and T-shirts, APB plans to sell goods and services connected to industries that are natural advertisers, like insurance firms and companies that make security systems.



THE BOSSSES
DAVIDSON (top),
COHEN, and
SAUTER are
retooling the cop
beat for the
Internet Age; a
number of jour-
nalists — lured by
stock options and
the Web's poten-
tial — want in on
this dot-com
action.

Despite all the financial maneuvers, everyone from Davidson and Sauter on down insists the journalism is primary. "We had a potential sponsor come in and say they wanted to do a major deal with us, and that then we could quote their people as experts in our articles," Sauter says. "It was tough to walk away from that as a start-up, but we did. It's very important that there not be a perception that our coverage can be bought."

Last spring, APB won the Society of Professional Journalists's online deadline reporting award. In February it won a Scripps Howard Foundation award for its package of crime-risk data on all four-year colleges in the country. Late last year, APB sued to overturn a decision by the federal judiciary blocking the release of financial disclosure information for federal judges. APB planned to put all 12,580 pages of the documents on its Web site. The case is pending in federal court.

There is a sense of optimism — almost idealism — at APB. Even old-timers like Sydney Schanberg, the Pulitzer Prize winning former *New York Times* reporter and *Newsday* columnist who was wooed by APB to run its investigative unit, sounds like a cub reporter when discussing the site's potential. "There is a bit of Toyland here," he says, "a constant

sense of 'Oh my, look what we can do.'"

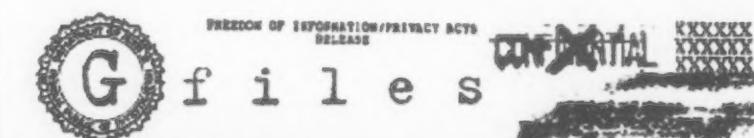
In fact, the newsroom is full of print and broadcast veterans, from places like *The Washington Post*, Reuters, *Time*, CNN, Fox News, ABC News, and UPI. Sauter said most editorial salaries fall between \$40,000 to \$70,000, and all employees get stock options. Bob Port, the former Associated Press editor who

led the team that broke the story last year of the Korean War massacre at No Gun Ri, signed on in July as APB's senior computer-assisted-reporting editor. He says the allure of APB is more about creating something new than the chance to cash in stock options. "It's an open frontier for information," Port says. "We are making the rules as we go along."

Such trailblazing often requires fixing things that aren't working. Last September, for example, APB redesigned its site after some readers mistook it for a police site and others found it too ominous. Now, the tone and appearance are lighter, and the coverage mix includes more safety stories, like minivan crash-test reviews, and instructions on how to fight off different types of rapists. Apparently, it worked. Numbers from Media Metrix, a company that tallies Internet traffic, indicate APB's "unique visitors" — the most accurate measure yet of traffic — rose from 311,000 in September to 815,000 in December. The *New York Times* Web site, by comparison, got 1.8 million unique visitors that month.

Despite the occasionally lurid subject matter, Levins says, APB's reporting and writing standards are in line with those at a community newspaper. He notes the play he gave an outrageous story about a group of killers in Australia who dissolved their victims in vats of acid. "We didn't play that as the screaming story of the day," he says, "even though there was a temptation to. I don't want a front page where people assume we are a supermarket tabloid."

Some days it can seem that way. Recent headlines include: EXEC DENIES GIVING PORN STAR INSIDE-TRADE INFO; ADDICT CAUGHT USING FAKE PENIS FOR URINE TEST; POLICE: PANTLESS JAIL GUARD HAD VIAGRA IN CAR. Such stories have a place at APB, but Levins says that as the site evolves there will be more stories like the series on America's aging prison population — stories that examine the complex criminal justice issues confronting society. A big part of that will come from Schanberg's investigative team, which is still ramping up. "That, ultimately, is the core of what we do," Levins says. ■



Nixon 'Smoking Gun' Tapes Released Incriminating Recordings Forced Resignation

HOW I GOT THAT STORY

FULL DISCLOSURE

BY DAVID SHAW

It was shortly after 8:30 in the evening, and my wife and our ten-year-old son and I had just finished dinner when the telephone rang. "David. Michael Parks," said the familiar voice on the other end of the line. "I want to hire you."

Hire me? I'd already been at the *Los Angeles Times* for thirty years, twenty-five of them as the paper's media critic, the last two reporting directly to Parks, the editor of the paper. What an odd choice of words, I thought. But I'd been waiting and hoping for this call and wasn't about to quibble about phrasing.

It had been twenty-four days since the *Times* had published a special issue of its Sunday magazine — an issue whose profits the *Times* had previously agreed to split with the subject of that issue, the Staples Center. When most *Times* reporters and editors learned of this arrangement by reading about it in other newspapers the newsroom erupted in protest and rebellion. Kathryn Downing, the publisher, apologized — in an angry, standing-room-only meeting with the news staff — and I had walked directly from that meeting to my desk and sent Parks a computer message saying that I wanted to write a "definitive, authoritative" account of how and why the Staples Center blunder had occurred. He had rejected that request and subsequent entreaties from me and others, even as a petition was presented to him, signed by fifty-nine of the paper's most respected journalists, calling for publication in the *Times* of "a thorough examination of the events that led to the Staples deal," to be edited by someone who was not involved in it. But he soon changed his mind — persuaded, he said, by the "quite intelligent, reasoned arguments of my colleagues" that a full investigation and full disclosure were required to "climb off this treacherous ground we were on."

"I've asked George Cotlar to edit it," he said when he called me at home with the assignment. "How do you feel about that?"

Cotlar had worked at the *Times* for



IASIEN & DAIBERI

THE WRITER David Shaw won the Pulitzer Prize for criticism in 1991. CJR asked Shaw to tell how he reported the 37,000 word story that documented the *Los Angeles Times*'s Staples Center debacle. This is his account. (His special report in the *Times* can be seen at www.latimes.com/news/reports/line/).

forty years, eighteen as managing editor, before retiring two years earlier. He was a man of courage and integrity and an excellent judge of both news and people. I liked and respected him and said that was fine with me, although I did have one concern: "When he was managing editor, he was often very critical of my media stories. He was too defensive of the paper."

"Yes, I know that," Parks said, with what seemed to be a bemused chuckle.

Parks and I agreed to meet in his

office at eight o'clock the next morning to discuss the story, and one of the first things he said to me then was, "I think we should do this as quickly as possible. Do you think you can have it done in this calendar month?"

"No. But I'd like to have it done in this calendar year. Psychologically, I agree it's important to get this done by then."

He nodded. "I hope you'll try to explain why this issue should matter to readers and I hope you'll provide some

DAVID SHAW: HOW I GOT THAT STORY

WHAT INTERESTED ME MOST WAS HOW ALL THIS CAME TO PASS, HOW MARK WILLES'S BLOW-UP-THE-WALL PHILOSOPHY HAD CREATED A CLIMATE AND CULTURE IN WHICH A STAPLES SCANDAL COULD OCCUR

sense of what prevailing industry practices and standards are, but apart from that, I want to give you as little direction as possible. Cotliar will be your editor."

Now it was my turn to nod. "I assume you won't read it before it's published?"

"When Cotliar signs off on it, that's how it will go in the paper."

"I assume Kathryn and Mark [Willes, Times Mirror chairman and c.e.o.] won't read it either, right?"

"Right."

We shook hands, and I walked out.

Cotliar and I met for lunch the next day, and over shrimp in black bean sauce and kung pao chicken, I reminded him of his angry reaction to many of my stories that were critical of the *Times*. To my surprise, he said he didn't remember criticizing anything I'd written, "except, sometimes, to say they were too long or had too many parts."

"Hell," I said, "a lot of people say that. But you once wadded up a copy of my story and threw it in the trash and told me that if I thought we were so bad and *The New York Times* was so good, I should go work for them."

"Look, David," he said, "I was — I am — loyal to the *Times*. But my loyalty is not to the institution itself so much as it is to the people who work there, and I've been in touch with enough of them to know how badly they've been hurt by this Staples thing. You don't have to worry about my being protective of the paper — or of Parks."

I repeated to Cotliar what I'd said to Parks about finishing by year's end. But I knew in my own mind that the story should be published even sooner — by December 23 at the latest — so it wouldn't get lost in the Christmas/New Year's/Millennium crush. That didn't leave much time for what would clearly be a complex story.

Speed, it seems to me, is often the enemy of accuracy and responsibility, and some colleagues criticize me as much for the amount of time I take on a story as for the

amount of space I take. But I'm obsessively — perhaps excessively — thorough and careful, the result of having a father who hammered into me, on a daily basis, in every context, his life's mantra: "check, double-check, and triple-check." Even on the Staples story, I was more interested in being definitive than in being first, and more concerned with what others might write about Staples after my story than with what they might write before my story.

Over the next six weeks, I interviewed 132 people, including Parks six times and Downing four times in person and once each on the phone, and several other principals four, five, six times — to clarify a specific point, at the last minute. I interviewed Mark Willes twice. Many times, I literally ran from interview to interview, working nineteen or twenty hours a day, seven days a week — including Thanksgiving Day weekend, when I joined my family for our traditional celebration in the Berkshires, in southwestern Massachusetts, but only after working on the entire cross-country flight, working to within an hour of turkey time and then working all day, until 5:30 A.M. the day after Thanksgiving, napping for two hours and then going back to work. (Turkey notwithstanding, I lost eleven pounds while doing the story.)

I used essentially the same reporting and organizational methods I've used on big projects for years. In order to get a good grasp on the general parameters of the story, as well as a few key specifics, I did my first interviews with some of the people closest to what I thought of as "ground zero" — a couple of editors on the Sunday magazine, the sports editor (whose staff wrote most of the stories), a couple of the leaders of the newsroom protest, two former *Times* employees, and the senior vice president in charge of advertising. I chose the latter primarily because I'd heard that many in the ad department were upset by both the newsroom reaction (they regarded it as "a lynch mob") and by the

prospect of my story ("a witchhunt," several said). I wanted to assure him that I didn't automatically regard the news side as saints and "his" people as villains, that I wanted only to find out just how everything had evolved, regardless of who might look bad — and that the best way for him to ensure an accurate story would be to cooperate and to urge his staff to do so as well. Like most reporters on projects of this nature, I didn't interview the top people — Willes, Downing, and Parks — until I was well into the story, although I interviewed Downing and Parks sooner than I might have under other circumstances, in part because I knew I would have to interview them several times, at great length, and didn't want to risk running out of time.

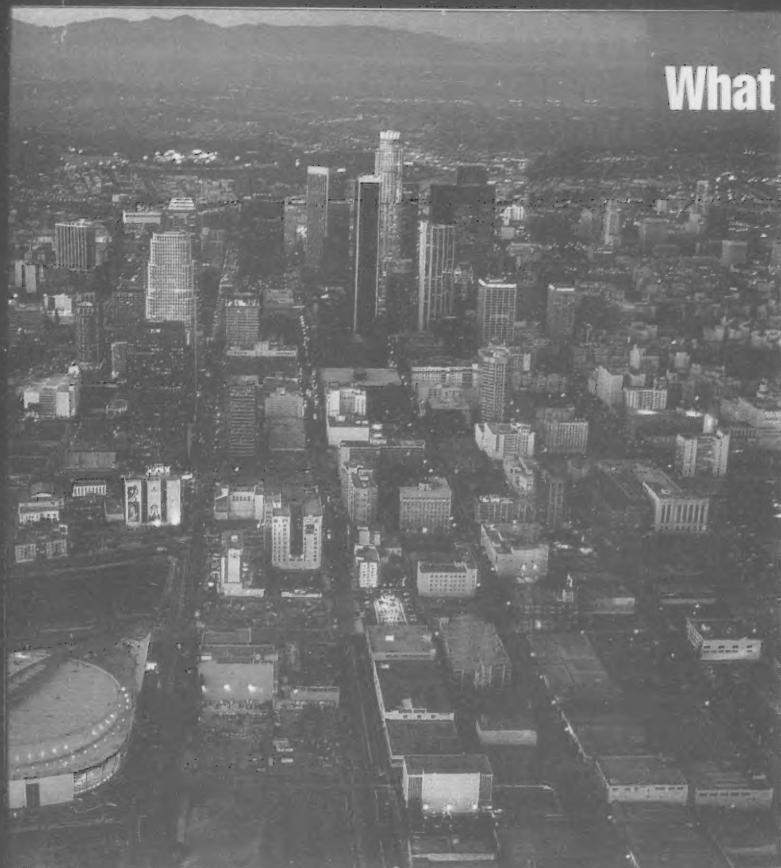
For each interview, I both took notes on my laptop and used a tape recorder. Every night, I went over the printouts of my laptop notes — often seven or eight interviews a day, once as many as twelve — marked them up with a highlighter pen and entered the most important points in my "running summary sheets."

As usual, I wrote the story based on my laptop notes, then went back to the actual tapes and listened to every direct quote to make sure it was both word-for-word correct and in the proper context. Knowing that it would take a couple of days of around-the-clock work to complete that process alone, I felt the pressure of time even more acutely, especially as the number of interviews and documents began to mount. But oddly enough, that was the only pressure I really felt.

Many *Times* colleagues and several friends outside the paper told me they



30 LOS ANGELES TIMES MAGAZINE



What the Staples Center Could Do for L.A.

The Theory Goes Something Like This: 'Build a Sports Arena Downtown and Revive the City Core.' But It's Not That Simple.

BY TONY PERRY
PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK MEYER

H

"The lights are much brighter these. You can forget all your troubles, forget all your cares. So go downtown! Things'll be great when you're downtown." Petula Clark, songstress and urbanologist, from her 1964 hit "Downtown."

ere is the short course on the American downtown at the end of the 20th century: A lot of cities are striving to overcome the Doughnut Syndrome—communities surrounded by nice stuff but hollow in the middle—as turning their urban core into entertainment meccas. Call it the Fun Zone theory: Millions of suburbanians are lured downtown for entertainment, and they return to shop, dine and stroll in areas reborn by their presence. Perhaps some may decide to move there, restoring a residential base to a city that's been steadily shrinking.

"Except for the last 40 years, cities throughout history have been seen as adult playgrounds, centers of culture and entertainment," says Michael Bevan, vice president of the Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit Washington, D.C., organization. "That's what cities are trying now to recapture." So yesterday's Roxy becomes tomorrow's 16-screen multiplex, yesterday's bank becomes artists' lofts. The doughnut hole fills up, the good stuff returns to the middle, the great restaurants, the movie palaces, the bass hotels, the department stores and, increasingly, big-time sports. At a dizzying pace, owners of professional franchises are committing to new downtown bases: parks, football stadiums and sports arenas.

Los Angeles is leading the charge. The Zamboni dream, last with the opening of the Staples Center, hopes are soaring. Civic leaders are rapturous over the possibility that the pieces are falling into place at last, and that the new arena will prove the catalyst. They are aware that L.A.'s history is fraught with failed hopes for reviving its once glorious downtowns. They also know that the arena could be wildly successful as a sports and entertainment center, while doing nothing to migrate the areas around it. Expert after expert says it is critical for a city to have an overarching plan for downtown and not to rely exclusively on a new arena.

Feeling another such plan, public officials and private boosters have tried to turn L.A.'s slow entry into the Fun Zone approach to their advantage. They have studied the experiences of other cities, including Cleveland, Phoenix and Denver, looking for lessons for L.A. More recently, a reporter taking a similar tour of those cities found the following: —An arena or ballpark alone will not redevelop a blighted area. If it worked that way the South Bronx, home of the New York Yankees baseball team, and Inglewood, where the Lakers and Kings have played for years, would be prospering, and the Detroit downtown would be booming.

THE CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM

Times executives made an agreement to share profits from a special section of its Sunday magazine (one of the display pages presented here) about the opening of the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles. The section was written and edited by *Times* journalists without knowledge that the subject that they were writing about was receiving compensation. On learning what had happened, hundreds of staffers signed a petition denouncing the deal. Publisher Kathryn Downing apologized, and ultimately reforms were introduced (CJ, January/February), including specific steps that strengthened the badly-weakened wall between the editorial and business sides of the paper.

didn't envy me my assignment, "sorting out the lies and affixing the blame in your own office, with the whole journalistic community looking on," as one longtime friend put it. But I can honestly say I didn't feel any such pressure. I didn't think it was my job to affix blame or to call anyone a liar. I wanted to find out the facts to the best of my ability, lay them out as cogently and compellingly as I could, and let the readers — journalists and non-journalists alike — judge for themselves what had happened and why and what it all meant. Fortunately, I'm blessed with a thick skin, so I've never worried much about what "they" will say about me and my stories. Various folks at the *Times* — including several high-ranking editors — have been so upset with my articles at various times that they've screamed at me or complained to the top editor or refused even to respond to my hallway

"hello." But I've continued to do (and to enjoy) my job.

On this story, I felt I had the support of the staff going in — and once Parks agreed to do the story, most people at the *Times* (and at the Staples Center) were cooperative, even if they were not all, shall we say, precise, candid, and in total accord in their recollections. Indeed, so many people at the *Times* seemed to suffer from a collective case of amnesia on so many key points that I began to wonder if perhaps some new, mind-altering drug had been introduced into the paper's internal water supply.

I had one other early problem. At our first interview, when Kathryn Downing gave me a stack of documents that I'd requested — contracts and memos and financial statements — she told me that all the financial data was "confidential" and so marked, "on blue paper." But I

couldn't write a credible story without using detailed financial data. I made a snap decision not to argue the point with her. Although Parks had told me she supported his decision to do this story, she probably wasn't thrilled about it; since the necessary financial information would probably be available from other sources, why risk giving her a reason to protest to Parks or to try to circumscribe or prohibit my inquiries? I put the confidential blue sheets in an envelope and sealed it, without looking at them. When the time came, I'd show Cotliar my independent documentation and suggest that late on the night before publication, he send Parks a message saying he was aware of the confidential nature of some of the material Downing had given me, and if she complained that the material was in my story, Cotliar wanted Parks to know that he

BLACK HAWK DOWN IN L.A.

BY JAY ROSEN

David Shaw's investigation of the Staples affair at the *Los Angeles Times* reminds me of *Black Hawk Down*, the best-seller by *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Mark Bowden. Originally a newspaper series, the book describes from every horrific angle the street battle in Mogadishu, Somalia, in October 1993, where eighteen Americans and some 500 Somalis were killed.

Like Bowden, Shaw wrote the anatomy of a disaster. Like Bowden, he talked to almost everyone on the inside. The plot for both authors turned on a simple question: How could such a thing happen? To answer, they had to narrate from multiple perspectives, reconstructing more than events. They tried to show what each participant understood—and failed to grasp—during critical stages in the folly. The truth lies there, they said.

Of course, no one died in Los Angeles, but the impact in the newsroom was the equivalent of a train wreck. And the crash site for *Times* journalists was their own newspaper. So if the lead character in Shaw's story is The Wall between business and editorial, the entire episode breached another wall—between doing journalism and having it done to you.

Shaw's piece followed the public trauma at the *Times* as it underwent scrutiny by its national competitors. It was partly because of this scrutiny, after some hesitation, that the newspaper decided to report on its disaster. Shaw's epic "Crossing the Line" emerged. (Full disclosure: Shaw critiqued my book in the November/December *CJR*.)

As a result, reporters and editors at the *Times* received a gift: a chance to greet for themselves the mix of pain, panic, shame, rage, and confusion that beset the players in a scandal once it gets out. Instead of exposing, they were the ones exposed. The ironies are obvious, but irony is not the whole story. "Crossing the Line" reveals some of the limitations of prevailing wisdom in the press. I note the following:

■ Working journalists have often said to me: How can we report on ourselves? Who would believe us? Shaw's piece sug-

gests: you report on yourselves by assigning a trusted reporter. You answer his questions, give him enough space, and take other measures in recognition of the special circumstances. Thus, the paper selected George Cotliar, a retired managing editor, to oversee the assignment, a prudent move that prevented the bosses from playing two roles. Difficult to report on yourself? Yes. Impossible? No. And if you do it well, you may emerge as more believable, not less. "Crossing the Line" showed that the *Times* was serious about admitting fault, a major step in regaining trust.

■ When you have a personal stake in a story, you are disqualified from reporting on it. Most journalists believe this. But in Los Angeles, the opposite seemed true. Who in America was more qualified than Shaw? The Staples story touched every theme in his work over a long and distinguished career. This helps explain the clamor in the newsroom (from Shaw and others) demanding that editor Michael Parks assign the piece to his Pulitzer Prize-winning media reporter. Shaw was the right person, as Parks eventually saw. He was right not because he had no stake, but because he understood, personally, the enormity of the stakes for himself, friends and colleagues, bosses, the newspaper, the city, the craft.

■ Journalists often claim that their job is not to improve things, but simply to report things. "Let the chips fall where they may . . ." is to them a matter of honor. Shaw's investigation obeyed this commandment, and rightly so. But as a work of journalism, was it really distinct from other work the *Times* had ahead of it—repairing the damage, restoring confidence, preventing future disasters? No doubt the newsroom staff wanted his report to be truthful, unflinching, and fair. But my guess is they also wanted it to spur changes at the *Times*: a restoration of The Wall, a renewed respect for journalism and its ethical code, an emboldened newsroom more able to resist encroachment. It's common wisdom that even to think about "outcomes" from your reporting endangers your reporting. Was this true for Shaw in "Crossing the Line"? Hard to believe so.

And when the *Times* published a list of reforms the day before Shaw's report, the connection was made clear.

■ grant that a self-report on the Staples scandal is an extraordinary case, an institutional crisis not to be wished on anyone. Still, the fact that Shaw succeeded, and was expected to succeed, tells me something. The culture of the press is strong enough to undertake (and withstand) serious self-scrutiny, which is different in kind from the scrutiny of *Brill's Content*, Howard Kurtz, *CJR*, or any other outsider.

Given its role in watchdogging everyone else; given the recent alarm about public trust; given the likelihood that journalism will continue to be done in a corporate setting, with conflicts abounding, the argument for regularly investigating yourself gains strength. Why wait for a runaway scandal? I know about ombudsmen, readers advocates, news councils, and the like. Beyond these lie the forms of reporting that make good on an intriguing pledge the *Times* put to readers: "We believe we must be able to shine as bright a light on ourselves as we do on others." Linked to improvements in practice, this belief may illuminate the next frontier in credibility—understood as valuable for the media business and vital to the journalism profession.

They don't give Pulitzer Prizes specifically for outstanding self-examination. But does anyone in the press know why? Suppose such a prize did exist. The entries would probably get better and better with time, as I am told they often do in the Pulitzers. And that could only mean that journalists are getting better at leveling with themselves, exposing problems and conflicts, finding a self-critique as pointed as their other practices.

Not every story will be as dramatic or painful as *Black Hawk Down* in the Newsroom. But surely the point is to avoid such episodes. So maybe the Staples scandal will push journalists down the path of serious self-scrutiny. If it doesn't, I hope some talented reporter asks why—and at what cost. ■

Jay Rosen is chair of the journalism department at New York University and the author of What Are Journalists For?

DAVID SHAW: HOW I GOT THAT STORY

I WAS WORRIED THAT SOME CURIOUS, ENTERPRISING, AND AMBITIOUS SOUL MIGHT SEE THE STORY BEFORE PUBLICATION. WHY TAKE CHANCES?

had seen my material from other sources and could assure him that I hadn't used hers.

Sure enough, I soon tracked down two or three other sets of the relevant financial material — with no strings attached — and that's what we did.

Inevitably, though, there were several other problems along the way. A few people didn't want to talk on the record. But I try hard not to use quotes from unnamed sources — and haven't used a single one in more than fifteen years. On the Staples story, as on many others, that meant going back to some sources a number of times to get them on the record and — with four sources — it meant agreeing to check the quotes before using them (something I've never resisted, or regretted, doing). Ultimately, every quote in the story had a name attached to it — and not one source backed off one word, neither before nor after publication.

How was I going to engage the lay reader in this complex tale about what might seem an esoteric subject? I decided fairly early on to write an introductory overview that introduced the key players and laid out the basic issues as forcefully as I could, ending with what I hoped would be intriguing questions designed to lure the reader into the bulk of the story. Then I would go into a detailed, dramatic (I hoped), chronological narrative about the Staples affair and its background and aftermath. In so doing, I was determined to avoid another contemporary blight on our profession — reconstructed dialogue, the journalistic tale in which direct quotes and verbatim conversations tumble upon the page as if from vintage Hemingway — except that the writer wasn't present for any of the conversations and didn't hear with his own ears any of the quotes. I decided to paraphrase, not quote, any conversation I didn't personally hear — and to attribute it as well. It would not be "Parks told Downing . . ." but "Parks

says he told Downing . . ." That probably made several passages seem a bit stilted and it may have robbed the narrative of some impact, but it seemed the only honest, fair way to tell the story, and that — above all — was my objective.

Although some saw my assignment as a traditional investigative job — a search for a smoking gun — I saw it more as



THE EDITOR

Retired managing editor George Cotlar was commissioned to supervise the project. Neither *Times* editor Michael Parks nor any of his senior staff saw the story before it appeared in print.

what ABC's Peter Jennings once called "journalism as archaeology." Sure, I did find considerable evidence that the project probably could have been stopped before it was started if the right people had been paying more attention — and that it could still have been aborted, before it was printed, if either Parks or Downing had realized what a grievous breach of editorial independence and integrity it represented. I found many inconsistencies in what top executives said they did and said — and I found that a number of reporters and key editors had learned of the profit-sharing arrangement in the three weeks between printing and publication, during which time the magazine could have been burned or shredded or an accompanying disclosure

could have been published. But no one even suggested taking any of those steps.

What interested me most, though — before, during, and after my reporting — was how all this had come to pass, how the deal itself had evolved, and how Mark Willes's blow-up-the-wall philosophy had created a climate and a culture in which the Staples scandal could occur, and occur without triggering alarm bells or protests among those editors and reporters who first heard about it. What I wrote in the end of the preface to my story, is that behind Staples was "a tangled tale of ignorance and arrogance, of blind loyalty and bad judgment, of deadened sensibilities and diminished standards." A series of incremental compromises had subtly undermined the independence of the editorial department in many ways; examining that erosion and the role it had played in Staples and its immediate aftermath was more important than the narrow specifics of Staples itself because of what it said about our newspaper — and about our profession — in a time of great upheaval and competitive pressure.

Regardless of what my story ultimately said, I knew there was bound to be considerable interest in it every step of the way at the *Times*, and — being paranoid about my *Times*-related media stories, even under far less stressful circumstances — I worried from Day 1 about how to safeguard the confidentiality of my material. My colleagues are honest, ethical professionals, but they are journalists, and journalists are curious. Besides, being a technological ignoramus, I could just envision committing some computer screw-up that would deliver all my notes and first drafts directly to Parks's computer, if not to Downing's in-box.

Even before I started writing, I took all my files home and, later, did all my organizing and writing away from the office — in Microsoft Word, not the *Times*'s own "Decade" word-processing system. Knowing that the story would have to be translated into Decade before

Los Angeles Times

SPECIAL REPORT

CROSSING THE LINE

publication, I spoke to Tom Kuby, editorial systems manager, about how to do that with maximum security.

"You can keep it in your personal basket," he said. "That's a security access level eight. No one in editorial, not even the editor, has higher than eight."

"How about you guys in IT?"

"We have access level nine."

"Can you create a new basket for George and me with an access level ten?"

Two days later, a message from Tom flashed across my computer screen: "The 'Winter' basket you requested has been added to your profile."

By phone, he set my mind at ease on another score: after the story was edited, we'd be able to compose it directly from that basket, without having to run it through the routine editing and production baskets, where it would have been accessible to many others.

"Perfect."

What was I so worried about? Parks had been true to his word and had taken a hands-off approach to the story, and there was no reason to believe that he (or Downing) would not continue to behave honorably. Still, I guess I was worried that some other curious, enterprising, and ambitious soul might see the story before publication and alert one of them to some particularly revealing or damaging passage and they would — what? I don't know — challenge me? Make me change it? Kill the story? I knew this was probably unreasonable and unfair — my judgment a bit clouded, perhaps, by adrenaline and fatigue — but why take chances?

Once the writing was well under way, I began to realize that this story was going to be longer than anything I'd ever written for the paper. It would fill multiple open pages, a special section unto itself. Now my paranoia took on a new form: if anyone in authority found out how long

THE SECTION

Shaw was asked by *Times* editor Michael Parks to chronicle without interference how the newspaper made the conflict-ridden Staples deal that led to a reporter rebellion and who knew what about the project when. "Crossing the Line" appeared on December 20 as a fourteen-page special section.

the story was going to be, "they" might object and call Cotlar and tell him to hold it to some specified, predetermined (inadequate!) length. I had great faith in Cotlar's judgment and wanted him to read it and form an opinion on whether I was off my rocker before anyone gave him any orders. I was fairly confident

I REMINDED
MYSELF THAT
THERE WASN'T
ANOTHER PAPER
IN THE COUNTRY
THAT WOULD
ALLOW ONE
REPORTER TO
EXERCISE THE
LATITUDE I HAD
ON THIS STORY

that he would agree with me — and that, under the circumstances, no one would overrule him. But I decided to alert him that we were looking at a truly large story, even by my standards, to see if he already thought I was off my rocker.

He didn't blanche at the words "special section," so I kept writing. I also kept moving on several other fronts — giving the photo desk updated lists of what we'd need from them, giving the art department the material necessary for various charts, graphs, montages, and other illustrative material, and enlisting the invaluable help and guidance of Steve Mitchell, the executive news editor

on the metro staff, a man of great talent and integrity. Mitchell had done the layouts and made the final selections on design, art, and graphics for most of my stories over the years, and I wanted him — needed him — to do Staples. I also recruited David Rickley, the production and technology editor, who's forgotten more about the technical aspects of putting out a newspaper than most people ever knew. His responsibilities include serving as liaison between editorial and the folks who parcel out daily space. As the story developed I told him — in strictest confidence, of course — that we'd need a special section some time between December 17 and December 23. Could he discreetly find out which days toward the end of that period would be feasible from a production standpoint?

"No problem."

At about the same time, I spoke with both Cotlar and Mitchell about their recommendations for a copy editor and a slot man — people we could trust not to discuss any of the contents outside our little group and, more important, good, tough editors who would challenge me and my conclusions and also catch any errors of omission or commission born of any of my manifest shortcomings (and most particularly of my crazed, three-hours-of-sleep-a-night rush to completion).

As the scope of the project — and the extent of the erosion of editorial independence at the *Times* — became clearer, I kept reminding myself that for all the paper's flaws, it still produced world-class journalism virtually every day. I also reminded myself that there probably wasn't another paper in the

DAVID SHAW: HOW I GOT THAT STORY

WE HAVE TO GET PAST STAPLES. WE HAVE TO TURN THE SHIP AROUND. WE HAVE TO MAKE SURE EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THAT THE REAL BOTTOM LINE FOR NEWSPAPERS ISN'T PROFITS; IT'S INTEGRITY AND CREDIBILITY.

country that would print the story I was going to write — and that there certainly wasn't another paper that would allow one reporter to exercise the latitude I had in all aspects of the story, from content and length to timing, staffing, art, and production.

On Monday, December 13, I called Cotliar and told him the story would be ready the next morning. My target date for publication was the following Monday, a day Rickley had told me was available.

"I still have some reporting holes to fill, and still have to go back to my tapes to check all the quotes," I said, "but if you don't get started now, we'll never get it in the paper on the twentieth. I can report during the day and check tapes at night while you and the desk guys are reading the story. Besides, I know how careful and conscientious you are; you'll read it all again, at least a couple of times."

I gave a copy to Mitchell at the same time. Even after I had cut the main story by almost 20 percent the night before, the total package, including two side-bars, was about 37,000 words. My best guess was that it would take twelve to sixteen pages, including art. (It wound up at fourteen.)

Ten hours after Cotliar got the story, he called with his editing suggestions. Virtually all were excellent. I incorporated them into the story, along with some changes engendered by my most recent reporting, and gave copies of the revised story back to Cotliar and to Mike Castelvecchi, our slot man, and to Larry Harnisch, our copy editor. Now it was time to put the story into Decade and work at the office.

We were offered an office on the third floor, in the newsroom. We preferred an office away from the newsroom and were given one on the first floor, with computers, telephones, lockable file cabinets, and new locks on the door. I asked for different locks, "with no master keys, just keys for those of us working on the project." The locks were changed within an hour

as my teammates sat there, giggling and shaking their heads over my paranoia.

After Castelvecchi and Harnisch were through with the story — improving it, as I knew they would — I asked both of them, and Cotliar, to please go through it once more, looking for anything that could be deemed speculation or a cheap shot or an unsubstantiated charge, "anything at all that could undermine the credibility of the story." On one critical passage that made me uncomfortable, I asked all of them to listen to my tape of a portion of one interview with Kathryn Downing "to be sure I'm being absolutely fair." We listened to the brief taped exchange four times. They saw no reason to change the story. But that night, on the way home, it occurred to me that we might have focused on the wrong interview with the wrong person. The next day, I asked Castelvecchi to listen to a portion of an interview with Michael Parks on the same issue. Still not satisfied, I called both Parks and Downing and re-interviewed them on the one point in question, then modified the end to one of the chapters in response to their replies.

At Mitchell's suggestion, we decided to paste up the section early Saturday morning, when few people would be around. David Rickley set up a "burn bag" and tossed into it every scrap of type that was replaced or unused. When we were done, we pulled page proofs, and I took the actual boards home with me overnight and stayed up until three o'clock in the morning, reading and tinkering. I went back to the office four hours later to enter my fixes in the system. Cotliar was already there, and Rickley, Castelvecchi, and Mitchell joined us — Rickley monitoring a second "burn bag" and keeping close tabs on the production schedule. He and Cotliar and I also coordinated release of the material to our national edition, our Web site, and the library databases in a way that wouldn't compromise security. Everything went smoothly, and Rickley,

his assistant, Mike Edwards, and I hand-delivered the boards to a plant about six or seven miles away, where the northern California copies of the national edition were to be printed. Later that night, Edwards would be delivering an early edition of the main paper to Parks's house, as usual, and while we were waiting for the pre-press work on the national edition, I suggested that our section not be included in that delivery: "Shouldn't Michael get it with his regular home-delivered edition in the morning, just like everyone else?" Agreed.

When the presses finally started to run the national edition, I told Rickley that "even after thirty-one years in the business, I'm getting goose bumps."

He grinned. "If you're getting goose bumps with these little presses, you ought to come to the [main] Olympic plant about midnight when those big suckers get cranked up and start spewing out 75,000 papers an hour."

Great idea.

Shortly before midnight, with the boards back at Times Mirror Square for production of the main edition, I took my wife and son down to the Olympic plant to watch the next day's paper — and our special section — come rolling off the presses. Hearing that roar and rumble and watching the papers come pouring off the conveyor belts was not only exciting on a personal level, it seemed somehow a tangible, powerful reminder of something far more important — the force that good newspapers can still be, even in this age of television, the Web, and the mega media merger. While I watched my son trying gingerly to extract a paper from the pile speeding past — not to look at my story, Lord knows, but so he could tell his friends he was the first one to see the next day's sports section — I found myself thinking, "We have to get past Staples. We have to turn the ship around. We have to make sure everyone understands that the real bottom line for newspapers isn't profits; it's integrity and credibility." ■

A THOUSAND VOICES BLOOM

At the start of the Internet century, media critics are blossoming like flowers in spring. This special report examines the publications and people who cover the media—and assesses how well they are doing the job.

THE MEDIA CRITICS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

During the first half of the century just ended, criticism of journalism was relatively simple and well-defined. It meant taking on the newspapers, which in those days presented a fat, inviting target, burdened as many of them were with sensationalism and sacred cows. Will Irwin muckraked the newspaper press as early as 1911. Upton Sinclair used an artifact of prostitution, *The Brass Check*, as the title for his 1920 exposé of press malpractice. That same year Walter Lippmann's *Liberty and the News* deplored the corruptibility of the press in wartime. Silas Bent took on the tabloids in



Ballyhoo (1927). And in a series of books in the 1930s George Seldes defended the working stiffs against those he called the "Lords of the Press."

Later, the fondly remembered A.J. Liebling, conductor of "The Wayward Press" in *The New Yorker*, ridiculed the self-satisfaction of publishers and editorial writers. Yet Liebling, like most of his peers except the grandiloquent Sinclair, never exaggerated his own effectiveness: "I had the impression of machine-gunning the newspapers' armor of smugness with dried beans as ammunition."

In the years since Liebling, journalism has expanded into television, cable and the Internet. It has added new subject matter and formats, and has itself become a subdivision of a vast enterprise

ROB HARRELL

known as the communications or information industry. But critics and avenues of criticism have also grown. When the *Columbia Journalism Review* was started nearly forty years ago, the magazine was almost alone in providing a vehicle for continuing press criticism. Now CJR shares the work with a great variety of competing or complementary efforts — other surviving journalism reviews, reporters and reviewers assigned to media beats, on-air critiques, online spinoffs and startups, caustic organizations right and left, the still-flourishing alternative press, professional associations, a few state and local press councils, scholars, and intellectuals in journalism schools and elsewhere, such foundations as the Freedom Forum, and — wonder of wonders — media criticism's nearest approach to a mass-market magazine (now part of its own conglomerate), *Brill's Content*.

The scale of this enterprise was reflected in a recent Lycos Internet search that turned up nearly 74,000 references to the term "media critic." Not all media criticism, however, is equally worthy; much of it is mere chatter. To help sort out at least part of the much-altered critical landscape, CJR has assigned writers to appraise major segments of the enterprise, including CJR itself, and their reports appear on pages 36-51.

The most obvious conclusion to be drawn from these reports is that open discussion of media (and journalism) issues is now taken for granted. Only a few decades ago, the organized press regarded criticism from outside as irrelevant and from inside as disloyal. In forty years, media managers may not have learned to love criticism but they have grown used to bearing it. For example, the refusal of news organizations to discuss the troubles of other news organizations has long since gone by the board. The grief that the *Los Angeles Times* brought on itself with its ill-advised Staples deal was chewed over in the press, in the critical magazines, on the air, and on line — and, ultimately, in the *Times* itself.

More important, the conclusion by mainstream media that the media themselves are an important news subject means that journalists are no longer the only audience for information about the media. This is appropriate, given the growing visibility and influence of the media in American society. The more the public knows of how the media operate, the more intelligent (even if a bit more cynical) will be its responses to what the media have to offer.

If anything has been lost along the way, it is the stimulation of a challenging and well-written literature of criticism. Liebling still has faithful readers in and out of journalism, and he had worthy successors in, for example, Ben Bagdikian, who has been

evaluators

DAVID HALL (CJR)
was most recently editor of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

His critique of CJR's Best Newspapers poll appeared in the January/February issue.

MICHAEL GARTNER (BRILL'S CONTENT)
is chairman and principal owner of the Iowa Cubs, a triple-A farm team. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1997 for his editorials in the Ames, Iowa, *Tribune*, and has had a long career in journalism, both print and broadcast.

BEN YAGODA (CJR)
is the author of *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made and Will Rogers: A Biography*. He teaches journalism at the University of Delaware.

BRENT CUNNINGHAM AND TRACY McNAMARA (OTHER MAGAZINES)
are assistant editors at CJR.

JONATHAN LARSEN (MAINSTREAM)
was the editor of *New Times* and *The Village Voice*, and a correspondent for *Time* for ten years.

NEIL HICKEY (TELEVISION)
is CJR's editor at large.

JAMES B. KELLEHER (ALTERNATIVE PRESS)
is a business writer at *The Orange County Register* and a contributing writer for the *San Diego Weekly Reader*.

JAMES LEDBETTER (INTERNET), a regular columnist for CJR, is the New York bureau chief of *The Industry Standard*, a magazine covering the Internet industry, and was the media critic for *The Village Voice*.

ROY PETER CLARK (ACADEMIC)
is senior scholar at The Poynter Institute. He is the founder of the Writing Center at the Institute, and is the co-author of *Coaching Writers*.

JOSH GETLIN (OMBUDSMEN)
is a correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times's* New York bureau.

warning of the danger of media monopolies for more than thirty years; and Fred W. Friendly, who became a guru of press ethics. Nor is there a publication that matches the amusing contrariness of *[More]*, the old New York journalism review featuring David Halberstam and J. Anthony Lukas, which in the end suffered the ignominy of merger with CJR.

But it is difficult to find in today's array figures of comparable distinction. Instead, the best-known practitioners are such durable reporters as David Shaw of the *Los Angeles Times* and Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post*, who are outstandingly competent but specialists, not advocates.

The old criticism had a reformist bent: Sinclair and Liebling both thought endowed newspapers might help. Neo-traditionalists such as the Project for Excellence in Journalism (supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts) call for a return to professional standards. Although there has been interest in a change-oriented program such as public journalism, today's critics tend to accept the structure of the media as a given. To find serious discussion of the role journalism plays in society and the polity, it is often necessary to turn to such scholars as Michael Schudson, James W. Carey, and their peers.

For journalists, the ultimate question is whether this growing stream of criticism helps them to do their work better — that is, to be both more skilled and more responsible. The answer is mixed. Without doubt, critics have helped raise the consciousness, or self-consciousness, of journalists. A Pew Research Center poll in 1999 showed majorities of the journalists polled agreeing with such broad criticisms of the media as their failure to cover complex issues or to distinguish clearly between reporting and commentary.

Yet it is less clear that working journalists find media criticism specifically relevant to their own conduct, or that the vehicles of media criticism are paying sufficient attention to those who work in the subbasements of the industry that Liebling presciently compared to a "gigantic, super-modern fish cannery." Critics and media reporters concentrate too often on petty violations, such as ephemeral conflicts of interest, when journalists may need help on truly substantive issues, such as what to do when faced with the eternal conflict between organizational policy and individual conscience. Even in an age flooded with media criticism, critics need to find more effective ways of addressing the working press. ■

James Boylan is founding editor of CJR and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

the magazines

An evaluation of the three principal reviews, and notes on some other publications

American Journalism Review

BY DAVID HALL

Give this much to *American Journalism Review*: its editors are neither ashamed nor afraid of American journalism. Since its predecessor *Washington Journalism Review* was founded in 1977, *AJR* has matured, standing at the center of a siege on journalism by an unaligned triumvirate. One army is those critics who cannot find perfection in the news so they decry the ideals of journalism. Another camp comprises a nervous generation of owners and publishers who run their newspapers as if they distrust news, the commodity of most market value and compelling brand loyalty. Then there is the ragged but most troublesome army, the newsroom cynics who see no glory in the hard news of local, daily journalism, so they withhold their talents for projects and investigations — Capital J Journalism. *AJR* embraces none of those mendacious extremes, which behave intellectually more like covens than soldiers. *AJR* for a quarter century has accepted journalism's imperfection while believing journalism can improve if it will build on its heritage, the heritage of democracy.

AJR has done a tough job well, with slips along the way. Analyzing the magazine draws the clear conclusion that it acts like a newspaper while living in a magazine's skin.

The magazine, published since 1987 by the College of Journalism of the University of Maryland, has stood for the right things: ethical journalism and the primacy of news. And *AJR* gnaws like a city editor on issues such as media consolidation, group ownership,



THE MEDIA CRITICS



AJR's last three issues dealt with the Los Angeles Times ("Paradise Lost"), the profitability of weeklies ("The End of Innocence"), and Internet ethics ("Navigating a Minefield").

Internet-driven changes in media, and the angst of so-called modern management in newsrooms. *AJR* wades often in swift waters. The January-February issue heralded "Paradise Lost?" on the cover, and although the question mark declared tentativeness, the article did take on bravely the ethical, journalistic, and business uncertainties at the *Los Angeles Times*. Everybody wants to know how the perfect newspaper, endowed by dollars and sunshine, could become humbled just like many other newspapers in recent years.

The reporter worked hard but more questions were raised than were answered. The omissions tell much about the perspective good reporters and editors often have on American journalism, romanticizing it to the point of lost perspective. At the *L.A. Times* perspective has always been lost in the mythology of a newspaper that spent money without worrying about its source.

The reporter could never get Otis Chandler in perspective. Chandler is a great man who pushed and pulled the *L.A. Times* to greatness — but he did not labor alone, as he would testify. Chandler inspired the newsroom but he also picked fine business managers who outfitted his juggernaut, people who are ignored in the *AJR* search for a current villain. The article's big flaw, however, is in ignoring Nick Williams and Bill Thomas, Chandler's editors. Thomas was simply the finest American newspaper editor during the 1970s and '80s, who used the *L.A. Times*'s abundant dollars to build greatness, one brick at a time. As for Otis Chandler, his place in American journalism is too important to trivialize as mythical.

American Journalism Review just completed an eighteen-issue, marathon report on the state of the American newspaper. The project was launched in May 1988 with an examination of the *Chicago Tribune's* efforts, not only to refine news coverage but also build business and journalistic ties with online services, television, and other newspapers within the Tribune Company. Again, many issues were raised that need to be revisited. For one, the *Tribune* newspaper should be isolated and analyzed to determine why it does one of the best jobs of any major metropolitan daily in offering traditional news coverage and feature sections that keep a news edge. Perhaps that unfortunate word, synergy, is the reason — but probably not. Something is going on in the *Tribune's* newsroom that its editors did not learn in an afternoon panel at ASNE. The magazine should find out.

The eighteen-issue examination of newspapers has concluded, which will disappoint thousands of *AJR's* readers. Editor Rem Rieder said the magazine intends to follow up the series, however, with three articles a year for the next three years, rereporting issues,

such as the diminishing amount of state-house coverage. The problems raised need more intense evaluation, and several of the issues need fresh coverage to bring new developments to light and to correct omissions.

In the sense that gave rise to *AJR*, the state of newspapers project is a review of American journalism. Yet the word, review, has never fit the magazine. Its strength is reporting and helping set an agenda for what American journalists discuss. When *AJR* ventures into classical criticism it can be silly. Consider a recent short piece that critiqued movies about journalism, which said:

"Ultimately, the movie and the true-life episode pose the same worrying problem. They are too much about getting the story and not enough about getting the truth."

Such naivete would be bad enough if a free-lancer wrote that paragraph. A senior editor of *AJR* wrote it, however, betraying a lack of understanding about daily journalism's most basic dictum: Get the story. Then get another story. Then another, until none is left. Leave truth to the ages, to the Pentateuch, Graham Greene, and Anne Tyler.

AJR prides itself on being current on Internet journalism issues. Yet last November it devoted five pages to explaining that online ethics are somehow more tricky than traditional journalism ethics. The piece contained this banal statement: "This is a time of considerable confusion for journalism and news as a business. That means it is also a time for clearheaded and careful thinking about what we are and what role we are to play."

And finally, in the last year *AJR* ran one article that was irresponsible in its ignorance, an examination of joint operating agreements. No good story can proceed from a misleading premise, and this *AJR* piece on industry economics bought the line that Joint Operating Agreements were established only to maintain two-newspaper voices. That was only a part of the story that Congress hid behind as publishers lobbied hard, knowing that the day of the multipaper metropolitan area was about to end. Their scheme to protect profits was ingenious, shameful, and legal. To publish a story based on talking heads, no numbers, and no understanding of modern media competition is really irresponsible — and not consistent with *AJR*'s standards. Let's forgive Rem Rieder this one, if he will come back and do the story with a reporter who understands the business of newspapers.

Readers of *AJR* expect substance and they usually get it.

Last September the magazine ran an analytical and statistical comparison of newspaper content in ten newspapers today versus those same dailies in 1963. Editors should



the source

If the Nile of journalism criticism flows from a single source, it is the work of A.J. Liebling, whose "Wayward Press" columns in *The New Yorker* ran between 1945 and 1963, the year of his death. Liebling started out as a newspaperman, and his stature as a Press critic was grounded in his own remarkable achievements as a reporter and writer.

The heart of Liebling's critique of journalism lay in the eternal conflict between reporting as a calling and newspapers and magazines as businesses. Liebling's book *The Wayward Pressman*, published in 1947, was dedicated:

"To the Foundation of a school for Publishers, Failing Which, No School of Journalism Can Have Meaning."

He deplored the callousness with which some publishers sacked their longtime employees when folding a newspaper, and lamented that, with diminished competition, American dailies were devoting less energy to covering the news. "In the mind of the average publisher, it is a costly and uneconomic frill, like the free lunch that saloons used to furnish to induce customers to buy beer."

Liebling's erudition was vast and lightly worn; he could invoke a trope of the boxing ring and Proust's Albertine with equal grace and casualness. He was a partisan for the reader, and tried to keep others similarly dedicated. And because he remained, as he put it, "a chronic, incurable, recidivist reporter," he managed to point out journalism's flaws without ever devaluing its purpose. —Evan Cornog

give that report several readings and much thought. Not all today is better.

The weekly newspaper, still vital in communities from the crowded northeast to the plains of Nebraska, was analyzed in December by an *AJR* report that showed how these quaint community publications are really generators of big bucks — and therefore prey to companies with money to invest that makes owners so rich many cannot say no.

AJR was not the first to grapple with credibility questions. But it cooperated with the Gallup Poll in July/August 1998 for a thoughtful examination of how the news-choice habits of Americans have changed. Newspaper editors can use the data to wring their hands, make their newspapers more trivial, or get back to being newspapers. Their choice. But the Gallup information in *AJR* is permanent stuff for bedside reading.

American Journalism Review is popular with reporters, editors, and news directors because of its contemporaneous commentary. It has a current feel, including the columns by Reese Cleghorn, president, and Rieder. And let's all tell the truth: we turn first to the pages on people who are hired, fired, and retired.

That is like a good newspaper. If *American Journalism Review* wants to improve as a model for journalism, however, it should fix its dreadful design.

AJR's design is actually typical of the chaos and timidity that reigns on the news and layout desks of American newspapers. Design has been taken away from editors and turned over to designers, many of whom know nothing of the drama and urgency of news and only about art, which does not always translate to a printed page. On the cover of *AJR* you often find pastels, the rage among designers, which are printed over light colors and emerge unreadable. Searching for the publication date is a monthly adventure. Inside, no graphic consistency ties magazine content together, reflecting a designer whose imagination does not match confidence, ability, or appreciation of *AJR*'s role. *AJR*, which has become an authoritative publication for American journalists, should make its design something to admire and inspire, not an obstacle to readers.

The shortcomings of *AJR* deserve attention because the magazine is vital. It does sell sizzle, especially on its covers. But don't we all, if we are honest? No malady is so dreaded as being unread, and *AJR* entices its subscribers with the hot stuff they talk about.

AJR affirms reporting. It elevates ethics. Over the years the magazine has tried to report stories about editing successes as well as failures. If the magazine is ambitious but uneven, it only treads the path of the imperfect but indispensable daily American newspaper. ■

Brill's Content

BY MICHAEL GARTNER

Any magazine that has Calvin Trillin and Mike Pride and Jon Katz and David McClintick as contributing editors can't be all bad.

Any magazine that has Bill Kovach looking over its shoulder can't be all bad.

Any magazine that takes no subsidies from the Pew Charitable Trust can't be all bad.

So the egotistically and eponymously named *Brill's Content* — with the musings and reportings of Trillin and gang and with the watchful eye of ombudsman Bill Kovach and without the moneyed influence and pernicious agenda of Pew and the civic-journalism crowd — is not all bad.

In fact, pretentious though it can be, it's quite good. It's a lot better than it was a year-and-a-half ago, when it was launched as a ten-times-a-year magazine for "enthusiasts of the information age." The question is: Will it continue to be fearless and feisty now that it has made a business alliance with media companies that it covers with a supposedly unblinking eye?

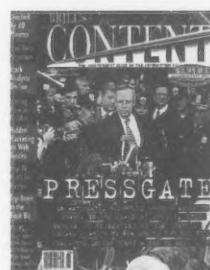
The deal is a Web site with CBS, NBC and, among others, the publisher of *New York* and other magazines. It was announced in early February, when the ink was barely dry on the issue of *Brill's Content* that raised questions about how independent the media companies can be as they make alliances with one another.

"Clearly, this all bears watching, and just as clearly, it's complicated and intimidating," *Brill's Content* editor Eric Effron said in his introduction to the January 2000 issue. The cover story, by *Brill's* senior writer Rifka Rosenwein, was headlined: "Why Media Mergers Matter. Having a few huge corporations control our outlets of expression could lead to less aggressive news coverage and a more muted marketplace of ideas."

Rosenwein's story noted that "where you sit, of course, often determines where you stand on certain issues." So will Steven Brill's new seat change his magazine's stance? Brill is giving up the title of editor-in-chief of his magazine, turning the job over to a former executive editor of *Talk* magazine, David Kuhn, but the founder will remain chief executive of his company and will remain involved in the editorial process. The new venture "raises the issue of whether Mr. Brill is compromising the magazine's independence," *New York Times* reporter Alex Kuczynski wrote. But Brill responded that ombudsman Kovach would keep a close eye on things and then, like most



THE MEDIA CRITICS



COVERS OF FIRST ISSUE
August 1998
and recent redesign:
February 2000



STEVEN BRILL

The founding editor of *American Lawyer* and *Court TV*, launched the media magazine *Brill's Content* in June 1998. He stepped down as editor from the magazine in early February to concentrate on his new Internet venture, *Contentville.com*. Brill will remain chairman and c.e.o. of the magazine and Web site.

publishers or media executives, said his own ventures were above corruption.

(A year ago, in a note calling attention to a wonderful *Brill's* story about how ABC News killed an unfavorable story about Disney — its owner — then editor Michael Kramer noted that "the disturbing story is also replete with the 'right noises,' powerful people offering strong words declaring that neither Disney nor ABC would ever countenance the very interference" the story documents.)

Clearly, this all bears watching, and just as clearly it's complicated and intimidating.

But right now, at least, *Brill's Content* is very good.

Here's why:

It's good because it has lots of interesting little stuff ("Stuff We Like," telling of the fascinating book, the goofy Web site, the notable columnist) as well as lots of interesting big stuff (from that insightful look at media mergers to a frightful look at the JonBenet industry, which was the February cover).

It's good because in less than two years it has really pissed off Kenneth Starr and Norman Pearlstine and *New York Times* reporters and Bob Woodward, among others, and that means that it takes on important issues and that big-time people read it and take it seriously and think it is important and try to spin it.

It's good because it always has a fantastic photo or two and then explains how the photo was taken.

It's good because it has just been redesigned, which it badly needed to be, and although the table of contents is ugly the redesign is pleasing and helpful.

It's good because, by and large, it has high standards of reporting. There are no anonymous cheap shots and few anonymous quotes. There are lots of facts and — except in the pieces by Steven Brill himself — few opinions. There is a flow to the organization and a rhythm to the writing.

It's good because it raises gossipy questions — and then tries to answer them. (Example: Why didn't *The New York Times* comment to its readers about why Abe Rosenthal was leaving? *Brill's* asked, and got an answer. "It's very hard to cover yourself aggressively," executive editor Joseph Lelyveld told the magazine. "We wanted to pay tribute to Abe's career on the paper and leave it at that." A future story might be: Why is it hard for the *Times* to cover itself aggressively?)

Overall, it has the right mix of substance (a hard look at how some in the press report the facts of second-hand smoke, or don't report them; how the Nielsen ratings work, or don't work; how the stock-pickers at the financial magazines score, or don't score), of style ("There was a time when I was what you might call seasonally uninformed," begins a lovely and

typical lament by Calvin Trillin), of sass (a list of the number of corrections per issue in popular magazines), and of silliness ("The 10 New York Media Heavies Hillary Will Have to Overcome; the monthly Pundit Scorecard").

Brill's Content was launched in August 1998. The early issues were often dogs — sometimes barking, sometimes slobbering, sometimes biting you in the ankle, sometimes jumping all over the furniture and sometimes just lying there. But it has grown into a faithful and sleek companion. The pretentiousness and tediousness have been easing since that first, thirty-page "Pressgate" screed by Steven Brill himself, though he was back at it again in October with his "proposals for voluntary restrictions (by the press) that protect privacy."

"We also know — and knew better after the first issue — that we have to pay attention to the pacing of everything we write and to the mix of what we offer in each issue," Brill told readers last year on the magazine's first anniversary, an honest if not particularly newsworthy self-appraisal but one that the magazine is acting on.

Brill's *Content* is, of course, different from the *Columbia Journalism Review* and the *American Journalism Review* in that it is a for-profit business. Or, at least, it hopes to be. So far, it hasn't made money, Steven Brill says, though he expects it to in two years. (The magazine is owned by Brill Media Ventures, L.P., and Steven Brill says that "I control a majority" of that.) The postal statement filed September 30, 1999, listed an average paid circulation for the previous twelve months of 189,201, with circulation of the issue closest to the filing date at 241,642. Brill says circulation now is 290,000, and he says ad revenue so far this year is up 50 percent from last year. He says the magazine ran 400 pages of advertising last year.

And while Bill Kovach has implied in his ombudsman column that one purpose of *Brill's Content* is "to elevate the standards of journalism," the magazine, unlike *CJR* and *AJR*, is aimed more at a broader audience than just the working-journalist set. It is aimed at anyone who wants to see the machinery and machinations of the press explained and explored and exposed by writers who know what they're doing.

Brill's Content doesn't have those personnel notes about editors moving from this city to that one or those classified ads seeking assistant professors for tenure-track positions or those self-congratulatory ads from newspapers that just turned over a stone or two in their hometowns and want to make sure that potential Pulitzer Prize jurors are aware. Rather, *Brill's Content's* ads are for Jack Daniel's or Saturns or Ralph Lauren clothes or first-class travel on British Airways, items

other magazines



EDITOR & PUBLISHER

E&P is a new contender in the world of media criticism. The magazine has been around a long time as a trade publication, but only recently began to improve its coverage. Then *E&P* was bought by *AdWeek*, and the pace of change increased. A quick redesign and a weekly cover story were only external signals. Worthy of any journalism review was the fourteen-page analysis of the impact of an African-American top editor on the city of Tallahassee — and the fallout following her firing. Other efforts are more erratic, but interim editor Bill Gloede said plans will include a more substantial redesign and reporting that is "analytical and thoughtful" as well as timely.



NIEMAN REPORTS

By tackling some of the less predictable issues in journalism — spotlighting the transportation beat, for example, or the superficial coverage of poverty — *Nieman Reports* stakes a claim to the title of no-frills media critic. Rather than try to solve journalism's many problems, *Nieman Reports* examines them and shows how others have dealt with them. The result is a blend of critical and utilitarian coverage mostly devoid of scolding. Although the how-I-got-the-story pieces sometimes border on the self-congratulatory, they also allow *NR* to include the social ramifications of what journalists do. An example of this approach at its best is Claudia Glenn Dowling's essay in the Winter '98 issue on how she balanced the roles of reporter-protector-advocate-friend while doing a story on how a family's violence affects its children.



MEDIA STUDIES JOURNAL

This is more a forum for discussion than a critical journal. Nearly everything is first-person, but the editors get the right people for it; often people who were involved in whatever issue is being dissected: Seymour Topping on covering the Chinese civil war, Jeffrey Toobin on coverage of the OJ trial, Linda Deutsch on court coverage. Tends to have a historical bent — the winter issue on the presidential race included four historical pieces — but that does provide context.

that probably are beyond the wishes or budgets of many readers of the other journalism reviews. But not all, as a media salary survey — that didn't include anyone at *Brill's* — in the May 1999 *Brill's* confirms.

When readers wrote pointing out that *Brill's* didn't include salaries of its own editors or contributors, editors Brill and Effron wimped out in a statement that only an editor and a lawyer could compose. "First, we generally are uncomfortable reporting on ourselves, because it can appear self-indulgent," they wrote. "Second, obviously we know the salaries of everyone who works here, but we know them only under confidential terms; we did not want to pressure our own people to waive their confidentiality. As for our own salaries, they involve information we have pledged to the other partners in the magazine's parent company to keep confidential." Whew.

That does, though, raise another issue. What information in the latest deal with CBS, NBC and Primedia has been pledged to remain confidential and will thus never be printed in *Brill's Content*?

Clearly, this all bears watching. ■

Columbia Journalism Review

BY BEN YAGODA

In 1965, after Tom Wolfe perpetrated his legendary hatchet job on *The New Yorker* in the *New York Herald-Tribune's* Sunday magazine, two young *New Yorker* staff writers, Renata Adler and Gerald Jonas, prepared a lengthy indictment of Wolfe's accuracy and integrity. The *Trib* declined to publish it. So they turned to the *Columbia Journalism Review*, a magazine launched four years before by Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, in an attempt (as a statement in the pilot issue put it) "to assess the performance of journalism in all its forms, to call attention to its shortcomings and its strengths, and to help define — or redefine — standards of honest, responsible service." In that brief time *CJR* had assumed a position of authority and respect in the journalism cosmos, and it seemed natural that it would not only print the Adler-Jonas rebuttal, but also engage an impartial outsider to weigh the evidence and render a verdict on Wolfe's guilt or innocence. (It was mixed.)

Of course, this was before *Brill's Content*, before the *American Journalism Review* (before even *AJR*'s predecessor, *The Washington Journalism Review*), before *Media Studies Journal*, before David Shaw and Howard Kurtz, before NPR's "On the Media" and before *Salon.com*. This was before a lot of things. The story of the nearly forty years of *CJR*, to this impartial outsider, is a story of a journal that in its youth and adolescence was more or less alone, and preeminent both on the merits and by default, that in its young adulthood began to be squeezed on both sides, and that in its early middle age finds itself in an uncomfortable quandary: struggling to make its voice heard above the media-crit din, and painfully unsure whether to take the high road of informed discourse or the low road of chatter.

I infer this anxiety not from public or private statements by *CJR* editors, but from the magazine itself — the look of it as much as (or maybe more than) the content. Initially, the design was as plain vanilla as it's possible to be: no photos, minimal graphics, uncoated paper stock, covers that consisted of a few story titles surrounded by a lot of white space. Slickness arrived slowly, slowly, with some cover art,



THE MEDIA CRITICS



CHANGING DESIGN OF CJR
September/October 1999
November/December 1999

editor's note

CJR editorial director David Laventhal asked Ben Yagoda to write this review, but all editing was done outside *CJR*, by William Marlow, managing editor of the *Baltimore Sun*.

some photographs inside and, not till the mid-eighties, glossy paper. Editorially, the general shift was away from the Olympian pronouncements of the early years, and towards a mix of opinion and reported dispatches on a wide variety of journalistic subjects. *CJR* also initiated and nurtured two trademark and very well-read regular features (most magazines are happy to have one): the Darts & Laurels report card for the press's worst and finest moments, and The Lower case, the inside-back-page reproductions of funny typos and other blunders.

Through the eighties and into the early nineties, I would judge, the magazine achieved a fairly happy mix of gravitas and pizzazz. The annual circulation statements in the back pages announced a readership during those years ranging from a peak of 34,826 in 1983 to 30,509 in 1990, and the advertisements showed that this group, while relatively small, was perceived by Madison Avenue as desirable. One 1991 issue featured ads for Volvo, Absolut, Lincoln cars, Quantas Airlines and the Trump Shuttle. This is not to say that the magazine turned a profit — it depended on grants and donations to balance the books — but it was indisputably providing a service that a significant number of significant people wanted.

All through the nineties, however, the media-commentary wave was building, and *CJR* clearly felt the effects of the new competition. Paid circulation reached 32,982 in 1993, but two years later had dropped 11.1 percent — to 29,329 copies. In 1997, *CJR* raised the stakes by unveiling a major redesign that incorporated extensive use of interior color for the first time.

This was obviously an expensive gamble. After looking closely at the last year's worth of issues, I would say that editorially, it paid off handsomely. The September/October 1999 issue (to pick one up off my pile) is literally full of interesting, informative, inventive, well-reported, well-written and well-designed stories. Especially notable is the blend between the practical and the theoretical, as seen in the package on writing about race, in articles on covering airline disasters and using children as sources, and in an amazingly comprehensive resource guide on all aspects of the campaign finance issue by NPR's Peter Overby, who, as they say, "owns" the story.

One thing noticeably missing from the issue is gossip. Indeed, except for an engaging upfront profile of *New York Times* obituary writer Robert McG. Thomas just months before he died, there is virtually nothing about personalities in any way, shape or form. There is no innuendo, there is no hype, there is no sensationalism, there are no takedowns (other than a sharp and funny impersonation of Maureen Dowd by senior editor Mike Hoyt), there are no lists.

There is seriousness but not dullness. In the media world of 1999, that approach obviously went against the grain. And CJR seems to have paid the price for doing so. By the time that September/October 1999 issue came out, circulation was down to 25,662, a drop that must have been especially distressing in the light of the substantial human and financial resources that were expended in producing the magazine.

With the following issue, CJR publisher David Laventhal became editorial director, replacing Marshall Loeb. To repeat, I have no inside information about his reactions, strategies, or goals. But the fact that in his first issue he inaugurated yet another redesign, barely two years after the previous one, suggests a sense of urgency. I cannot say whether the new format is more frugal — it seems to be so, with fewer boxes and charts — but I can report that on the basis of two issues, it is consistently less attractive and less helpful. I find the covers, photographs, and layouts lackluster, the new typefaces clunky, and the individual stories within packages hard to disentangle.

Editorially, one has the sense of an attempt simultaneously to economize and create buzz. Thus, instead of a dense resource guide by Peter Overby, you find excerpts from the transcripts of big-foot panels on this or that (the big feet presumably being willing to offer their top-of-the-head wisdom in exchange for lunch, carfare, no misspellings of their names, and maybe a modest honorarium). This is a hit-and-miss kind of thing. Thus, the November/December issue contains a provocative conversation between Joe Klein and Gail Collins on election coverage. But in the same issue, a panel on the press in the twentieth century, featuring Harold Evans, Jules Witcover, Gwen Ifill, Morley Safer, David Halberstam, Judy Woodruff, and others, yielded not a dialogue but a series of fairly disconnected and only intermittently arresting nuggets.

To be sure, the two issues of the new CJR contain a respectable number of worthy articles: a long and thoughtful "Letter from San Francisco" by Peter H. King; a provocative (and newsworthy) proposal for network coverage of political conventions by Roone Arledge; a meaty package on sports journalism; and an impressively rigorous study of the relation of "quality" and ratings in local TV news, produced by the Project for Excellence in Journalism. And given Laventhal's estimable track record — he created the *Washington Post* Style section and, as editor of *Newsday*, turned it into an outstanding paper — one can reasonably expect improvements in the months ahead. But at this juncture, there is a distinct sense of the whole being less than the sum of the parts.

The most dispiriting element of each issue is a list — lists being famous as ways to get free publicity without much effort (ask Mr.

other magazines, etc.



What's FAIR? | Where Next? | Search
Who's Who | Contact Us | Home Links

EXTRA (www.fair.org)

A strong editorial voice dominates *Extra*, promoting the ideology of FAIR, the media watch organization behind the liberal publication. Still, *Extra* — both in print and on the Internet (www.fair.org) — has moved away from covering ideological issues to rebuttals on specific stories in the media.

OBSESSED OBSERVATIONS

Media-obsessed is the only term to describe two New York weeklies — the salmon-tinted, snooty *New York Observer* and the rowdy, low-down, opinion-ridden *New York Press*. Each is besotted with the personalities and performance of news people. Vide: *Observer* columns "Off the Record" and "The Transom" and *Press* owner Russ Smith's near-endless weekly rant, "Mugger."



For Fairness, Balance and Accuracy in News Reporting

MEDIA MONITOR

Aim, the other side of the spectrum from Fair, is only on the Web, where it supports Accuracy in Media, the conservative watchdog group. More of a newsletter than a newsmagazine, the timely Internet publication often strays from media criticism to denouncing the current political climate — last month's issue included a defense of Linda Tripp. (www.aim.org)

THE NATION

The voice of the Left contains a fair amount of media criticism, primarily through guest essays in its *Media Matters* column and signed editorials by Eric Alterman. These are wide-ranging assaults on everything from the oppression of the Nigerian press to the failure of the press elite to aggressively cover Clinton pal Vernon Jordan. It all comes from a distinctly *Nation* point of view.



Blackstone). November/December had "America's Best Newspapers." Theoretically, such a ranking could have some value, but as executed by CJR, I would say, it had little. Talk about top-of-the-head: the list was determined by about 100 newspaper editors, who each sent in their ten faves but were not asked to verify that they had even read the newspapers they were nominating, much less to distinguish between national, regional, and local papers. In a shocker, *The New York Times* came in first, sixteen spots ahead of the (Minneapolis) *Star Tribune*, whose blurb read, in its entirety: "Under new ownership (McClatchy), the commitment continues to quality coverage and to an understanding of the real needs of the audience." I would submit that this sentence is so nebulous as to be nearly worthless.

The January/February list, in which a group of high-profile magazine people selected a predictable top-ten magazine editors, wasn't any better. It also raised questions about objectivity. Although readers were told that Gregory Curtis of *Texas Monthly* recused himself when his own name came up, they were left to wonder whether Kurt Andersen stayed in the room when the panel discussed his onetime business partner at *Spy*, Graydon Carter, and whether Daniel Okrent was present when his corporate colleagues at Time Inc. were nominated.

The winners' blurbs were studded with vague anonymous comments, such as this one about *The New York Times Magazine*'s Adam Moss: "A sensitive, smart, blue-pencil editor." Fine, and maybe even true. But how much more valuable and interesting would it have been, say, to have CJR publish a piece analyzing how Moss edits a story in the *Times Magazine* — from Moss's conception, to his advice to the author, to his blue-pencil, to its eventual publication? Unfortunately, at the present moment in its history, this is not the kind of article one can hope to find in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. ■

television

Some watchdogs appear on TV and others in print

BY NEIL HICKEY

On Television

Don't look to television or radio for a whole lot of regularly scheduled, systematic, tough critical analysis of how well or poorly news organizations are doing their jobs. The meager landscape looks like this:

- **Reliable Sources:** CNN's weekly half-hour, featuring *The Washington Post's* "Media Notes" columnist, Howard Kurtz, and the veteran newsman Bernard Kalb.
- **Fox News Watch:** Eric Burns moderates the Fox News Channel's thirty-minute panel show "devoted to exposing media bias in the coverage of weekly news events."
- Terence Smith on *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*: the former *New York Times* and CBS News correspondent musters media mavens, news executives, critics, authors, Wall Street analysts, and shoe leather reporters for chat about media and public affairs.
- **On the Media:** A weekly NPR hour hosted by Brian Lehrer with the purpose of (according to NPR) questioning "common beliefs" about how news gets reported.
- **CounterSpin:** Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting's weekly radio half-hour on more than a hundred noncommercial stations, highlighting "biased and inaccurate news . . . , gaffes and goofs by leading TV pundits"
- **Media Matters:** An occasional PBS prime time newsmagazine, with former *New York Times* press correspondent Alex Jones as host.

Reliable Sources producer Lucy Spiegel feels her team works well together. "The wonderful thing about having Howard [Kurtz] and Bernie is that they're from two different generations of journalism," she says. The program "has never been shy," she insists, about knocking CNN, as it did over the network's Tailwind story. At the start of each program, Kurtz states the show's mission: "We turn our critical lens on the media."



Fox News Watch, as a feature of Rupert Murdoch's conservative Fox News Channel, is putatively on the lookout for liberal bias in the press, with panelists handpicked for their politics. But the program actually is less Murdochian than it might be — there's no stern mandate merely to nail liberals in the press.

None of the old-line commercial broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) has a press criticism program in its regular schedule. How come? "It's a paradox. Obviously it's not in the interest of media corporations to do a lot of incisive criticism of themselves," says Brian Lehrer (no relation to Jim). Inter-network criticism of each other's news coverage isn't really feasible, says Richard Wald, former ABC News executive and now a professor at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. No matter how much a network might deny it, knocking the competition can easily be seen as motivated by self-interest.

In Print

Most of the country's 1500 dailies have a TV critic, either homegrown or syndicated. They dutifully watch many hours of television programs every week, and steer their readers onto the good stuff and warn them about the rest. Entertainment shows are their main subject, but TV critics on the nation's newspapers are giving more and more column inches to critiquing TV news — its programs, personalities, and performance.

"A third to a half of my column is

usually devoted to TV news," says Pulitzer Prize-winning TV critic Howard Rosenberg. "It's the area of television that most intimately affects people." He's been at it since 1971, first at the *Louisville Times*, and for the last twenty-two years, the *Los Angeles Times*, which also distributes his column nationally.

Rosenberg — like many of his peers — sits at home before four television sets, and passes judgment on TV journalists' handling of the news. He can be as lavish with praise as with blame. TV news's coverage of the global millennium celebrations was, he wrote, "a taste of the television that could be — one using its glorious technology to build cultural bridges and elevate awareness of distant peoples"

Tom Shales, *The Washington Post's* chief TV critic since 1977, derives much of his considerable influence from being in the nation's capital and thus read by power brokers in politics and the regulatory agencies. (He's also syndicated to 120 papers.) Sardonic, witty, wry — Shales serially enrages, amuses, and startles his readers. At *The New York Times*, Walter Goodman's reviews of news-oriented programming are deadly earnest, well-reasoned, dispassionate, and equitable.

According to Eric Kohanik, president of the Television Critics' Association, viewer interest in news programs accelerated in the 1990s, first with the gulf war ("the first, live TV war") and then with stories like the O.J. Simpson trial, Princess Diana's death, and the Monica Lewinsky scandal. It coincided with an "overall decline" in the quality of entertainment programs. "Television's idea machine was running dry, so news programs stepped up to the plate and began to fill a void."

At *Newsday* on Long Island (New York), columnist Marvin Kitman (thirty-one years on the job) approaches his mission with the verve of a stand-up comic — needling, lampooning, mocking news shows and personalities. "I love covering TV news," he allows, "especially national news. Anybody who earns more than a million dollars a year is, to me, fair game. I'm fascinated why some TV people are paid \$7 million for the little amount of work they do. Readers love it when I make fun of these multimillionaires."

Does he ever read other TV critics' columns? "Never. Many are just mouthpieces for the network p.r. machine. I don't want to be influenced by them. I can make my own mistakes." ■

mainstream media

A look at the performance of some of the key media critics

BY JONATHAN Z. LARSEN

There was recently a delightful exchange in *New York* magazine between that magazine's media columnist, Michael Wolff, and Walter Isaacson, managing editor of *Time* magazine, that seems at once totally innocuous and enormously revealing. Isaacson is trying to explain to Wolff why he is leading his magazine away from gravitas and into the mosh pit of news-you-can-use and news-to-amuse, where more and more publications are now pressed together cheek by jowl.

Isaacson: "We used to have great access to great events and report them with Lippmann-esque certitude. Now our goal is to tell stories that connect with the way we live. We want to know about the debates happening around the dinner table rather than around the Senate committee tables."

Wolff: "Walter, I am not sure anyone sits around the dinner table anymore."

Isaacson: "Hmmm. The water cooler, then."

Media reporters are caught up in the same cultural miasma. In many respects, their jobs have become exponentially harder. In a bygone era, the press writers for *Time* and *Newsweek*, hiding behind anonymity, regularly commented on the content of newspapers and magazines. And the late Ed Diamond, writing in *New York* magazine, reported in turn on the *Time-Newsweek* wars — which cover story was more compelling, more timely, more successful on the newsstand. But the worth of the content itself — newspaper and magazine articles, television documentaries and newscasts, who broke which stories — no longer seems to be the central focus of media reporters. *Time* and *Newsweek* have dropped their regular press columns. More and more, the "business" of journalism has captured the attention of these reporters every bit as much as it has the attention of Wall Street and multinational corporations. And the content itself has gotten so flaccid in this age of sex and celebutude that what is there to say after you have said: Yuck!

How are media reporters faring in this bewildering environment? In an attempt to find out, CJR picked the beat reporters for four of the



THE MEDIA CRITICS



KEN AULETTA
Media guru for *The New Yorker*. Excellent reporter. Gets the Big Picture. Amazing access, understated style. Works fault line between the old media and the new.



MARK JURKOWITZ
Media reporter for *The Boston Globe*. Solid, prolific, needs to perfect the form. On tightrope during *Globe's* troubles.

country's leading dailies — *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, and *The Boston Globe* — as well as the media columnists for *The New Yorker* and *New York* magazine, and reviewed their work over the last year and a half. (In the case of *The New Yorker*, which runs media pieces only occasionally, a longer time frame was needed.)

KEN AULETTA. It can be argued that no other reporter has covered the new communications revolution as thoroughly as Auletta. To be sure, he has had enormous advantages. In 1992, shortly after she took over as editor of *The New Yorker*, Tina Brown invited Auletta to write a column called *Annals of Communications*. With almost unlimited space to work with, a generous travel budget, and, one presumes, total freedom of subject, Auletta, a courtly journalist of the old school, has delivered the goods. His writing from 1992 through 1996 was thematic enough to be pulled together into a book entitled *The Highwaymen: Warriors of the Information Superhighway*.

From the outset, Auletta understood that the new concentration of power, pursued under the banner of synergy, augured ill for journalism. As early as 1995 he wrote: "What is already apparent is that synergy is rarely journalism's friend. The business assumptions behind the word — cost savings, a 'team culture,' the 'leverage' of size, the desire to boost profit margins — can be a menace to the business of reporting."

Auletta was among the first to suggest that the tremendous coalescing of power, further strengthened by a plethora of cross-ownership and collaborations, represented nothing less than an American *keiretsu*, the Japanese word for a multi-industry cartel. In 1997 Auletta predicted that the existing handful of giant media companies would spin "ever bigger webs" — webs to cover all of communications, from owning ideas, through owning the factories that manufacture the ideas as products, to owning the means of distributing those products, and on to owning their afterlife." Thus he had neatly anticipated the further consolidations to come: of Viacom and CBS, of AOL and Time Warner.

And finally, when Michael Kinsley, a highly respected print journalist and editor, quit his job in late 1995 as the liberal voice on CNN's *Crossfire* to start up an Internet magazine for Microsoft, Auletta was one of the very few to recognize that this was no mid-life crisis, no single aberration, but rather signaled that the flight to the Internet had officially begun.

For much of 1998 and 1999, Auletta covered the antitrust trial of Microsoft. His article, the longest published so far under David Remnick's reign, ran in August 1998, and necessarily left readers in suspense. The trial was

mainstream media

then and still is far from over. Stay tuned to the pages of *The New Yorker* for the outcome of the first major attack on *keiretsu*.

MARK JURKOWITZ Compared to magazine writers like Auletta, media reporters for the large daily newspapers face considerable constraints: ever-tighter deadlines and ever-tighter budgets, not to mention the traditional constraints of space and style. They risk getting so bogged down in media "day" stories (promotions, firings, quarterly earnings reports, Pulitzer nominations), not to mention covering crises in their own papers, that they cannot shake free to report the larger media context to their readers.

No one has had a harder time of it in this regard than the *Globe's* Jurkowitz who became a media writer in September 1997, after a stint as ombudsman. For much of 1998 he found himself reporting on a huge media story developing under his very nose, in the *Globe's* own newsroom. Within the space of two months, the *Globe's* editor, Matt Storin, had asked for the resignations of two of his best columnists, Patricia Smith, a stylish writer and published poet who had been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize just months before, and Mike Barnicle, Boston's much-beloved answer to Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill. Smith had confessed to total fabrications. Barnicle had been charged with lifting jokes from a George Carlin book and plagiarizing material from an A. J. Leibling biography of Louisiana politician Earl Long. Worse, the stories became linked, because Smith, who is black, was fired first, even though suspicions had existed for years, but had never been addressed, about Barnicle, who is white. Charges of racism and sexual discrimination wafted around the *Globe* for months. Nothing "New Media" about that.

For the better part of five months, Jurkowitz had to walk this tightrope, running the risk of enraging his editors on the one hand or his colleagues in the newsroom on the other. His stories were routinely bested by his competitors. The crisis ended just in time for Jurkowitz to lift his nose out of the muck and report on the larger world. Here he fared somewhat better. No doubt stunned by the foibles of his own colleagues, Jurkowitz was ready to cut Clinton more slack than the majority of journalists. "The real question," Jurkowitz posed, "is when in this voyeuristic media culture do we finally say, 'no más?'" A few months later, Jurkowitz delivered an equally thoughtful treatise on the declining popularity of traditional media, in particular newspapers like his own and television newscasts. He cited several causes, among them fewer compelling local issues and characters and the multiplying outlets for news itself. Oddly, he



THE MEDIA CRITICS



HOWARD KURTZ
A consummate reporter. Ubiquitous TV commentator. Has humor. Can write long-form.



DAVID SHAW
A dean of American newspaper media critics. Writes dispassionate, endless tomes. Staples guru.

does not mention the "no más" factor, which poll after poll suggested was widely shared among the readership. Wistfully, Jurkowitz concludes: "So where have all the faithful readers of newspapers and watchers of the

TV newscasts gone? To sleep, to cyberspace, to cable TV, or perhaps they're just stuck in Boston traffic."

HOWARD KURTZ Kurtz has become a ubiquitous figure on national television talk shows, affecting a doleful, slightly pompous attitude. It is a relief, then, to discover that the real Howard Kurtz — the print version — is witty, informed, and entertaining. Comparing the various stacks of reprints for seven media reporters, he is hands down the most prolific. By himself, he fills a Media Notes column for the *Post* that is certainly as good as that which runs in *The New York Times*, which has two reporters contributing. He brings something to the table on every media event he covers. When the Smith/Barnicle fiasco happened, Kurtz traveled to Boston and informed his readers that the Barnicle of legend — a poor Irish kid championing the urban Irish of South Boston — had now become a "well-heeled television star" living in the exclusive suburb of Lincoln and driving "his black BMW into town to report his tales of inner-city crime and pathos." (Imagine Jurkowitz writing that!) This was an important missing perspective, because it helped explain how a star like Barnicle had lost the support both of his own editors and many of his colleagues in the newsroom.

Last summer, Kurtz joined the George W. Bush campaign trail in Iowa, both part of, and ruefully commenting on, "the media beast" that was now loose on the land. "The beast lumbers from story to story, trampling everything in its path. It gorges itself on the O.J. story, on the Monica story, on the Kosovo story, at least until readers lose interest. The beast is now voraciously hunting for its next meal, and George W. is looking exceedingly juicy . . ."

DAVID SHAW Mark Willes, the c.e.o. of the Times Mirror Company, which owns the *Los Angeles Times*, once remarked that in his efforts to build the newspaper's circulation and profit margins, he and his paper ran the risk "of being remembered as the crash dummies of American journalism." And watching Willes's every move as he drove his experimental newspaper model faster and faster was David Shaw, who early on seemed to predict the outcome in a 17,000-word series in the spring of 1998 called "Breaching the Wall: A Revolution in American Newspapers." After the crash last fall, it was left to Shaw to collect DNA samples and

draw the chalk marks at the crime scene (see Shaw's own account on page 27).

Yet between Shaw's two-parter on the late lamented "wall" in journalism and his reconstruction of the "crash," there was an odd assortment of major projects that seemed somehow off point. In August '98 he delivered another two-parter, this one called "Scoop: the Rush to Be First." It was an attempt to address the dangers attending the new twenty-four-hour news cycle, but one suspects his conclusion — go a little slower and be more careful — received, at best, a *Yes, Mother*, from working stiffs who have Matt Drudge (or their own version of Mark Willes) breathing down their necks. David Shaw, an old pro with virtual tenure, can go slowly and carefully. But how many others can do so?

Then last year, in the months leading up to the Staples saga, there were two pieces that attempted to expand the purview of media criticism itself: a 13,000-word opus on Robert Parker, wine guru and columnist, and a long disquisition on film criticism. The wine series was excellent, and, one suspects, on a subject as resonant with Shaw's readers as anything he has written in years. But is Robert Parker really a journalist? Is it possible that Shaw himself, at this point in his life, would rather be criticizing movies and sniffing wine?

FELICITY BARRINGER. It was Barringer's story on October 26, 1999, that really called national attention to the *Los Angeles Times'* Staple Center disaster, although Barringer herself reports that the story was broken in *New Times Los Angeles*.

In August 1998 Barringer traveled to Boston to cover the Barnicle fiasco, and encapsulated as no one else had the bravado with which Barnicle had fought his just punishment. Barnicle, she reported, "remains enough of a figure to have turned a painful exercise in journalistic discipline into a personal referendum, one more swaggering scene in the long-running Boston drama of *Us* versus *Them*."

Barringer also delivered one of the most thoughtful pieces on Tina Brown's *Talk* magazine. Writing with Geraldine Fabrikant, she focused on the claims of "synergy" between the magazine and movie properties, quoting Nieman curator Bill Kovach as saying: "If the stated purpose of this is to develop entertainment packages, that's not what journalism is. Journalists survey the world to inform the citizen, not with the idea of creating a property to entertain the citizen."

Finally, in an article on the fallout from the case of Richard Jewell, the man falsely charged by the media for the 1996 Olympic bombing episode, Barringer suggested that the saga shows "how news coverage, started in a particular direction, can become a journalistic juggernaut, hard to turn, harder to reverse."



FELICITY BARRINGER
Veteran *New York Times*
media reporter. Very solid.
Strong on business side,
weaker on old media/new
media issues. Offers
little direct criticism.



ALEX KUCZYNSKI
Fast rising star at
The New York Times.
Covers the magazine field.
Strong writing with attitude.
Unpredictable, amusing.



MICHAEL WOLFF
Media columnist for
New York magazine.
Very funny. Very opinionated.
Will take on anyone.
Attuned to new
media issues.

ALEX KUCZYNSKI. Kuczynski, who was trained at the *New York Observer*, a paper with true brio, has a knack for getting wonderful quotes from her subjects. Using the funeral of Willie Morris, the legendary editor of *Harper's* magazine as a jumping-off point, she delivers a disquisition on the magazine business, quoting Norman Mailer ("They're glitz bags") and Michael Herr ("You don't know where television ends and print begins anymore. It's all one sort of horrible media stew . . .").

She pays a visit to Jann Wenner, on the eve of his taking *Us* magazine weekly in a head-to-head confrontation with *People*, and finds him looking at the Time Warner building and saying: "There it is. The evil empire." Wenner shares with Kuczynski one of the planned stories for the launch: "Ten Ways a Celebrity Can Wear A Sarong" (seriously). Of all the people reporting on the sale of *The Atlantic Monthly* by Mort Zuckerman, only Kuczynski gathered in the essential detail: Zuckerman made the announcement to the staff by speakerphone. She quotes one staffer as saying, it "was a truly postmodern experience."

Kuczynski's most controversial piece to date has been on Tina Brown's *Talk* magazine. She begins: "After four issues, Tina Brown's *Talk* magazine is no longer the talk of the town." Then she renders an accounting: "Of 22 articles in the first four issues written by people in the film industry or about people or characters in the film industry, 11 featured people recently or currently affiliated with Miramax or Disney Projects" (Disney owns Miramax and Miramax is the majority owner of *Talk*). Brown subsequently objected that though these people may have had business with Miramax, they were not owned by the studio. But that seemed a quibble. Kuczynski had arrived.

MICHAEL WOLFF. Perhaps one of the greatest strengths a contemporary media critic can have is a working knowledge of the changes taking place in the industry. And few people are better positioned than Wolff, who once tried to start up an Internet company and wrote a book — *Burn Rate* — about his failure.

A wonderful stylist, Wolff tosses off memorable lines in almost every column. Describing Anna Wintour, the editor of *Vogue*, at a panel discussion, he describes her as "some silent film star who suddenly, horrifyingly, speaks."

And finally, on the old media confronting the new media, he writes: "Each and every one of these people have fear in their eyes — fear that they are too late, that the world has passed them by, that in the equity decade all they will have is a salary, in the entrepreneurial decade all they will have been is employees."

But Wolff can also be serious. Anticipating Clinton's near-escape of impeachment, he wrote in September 1998: "the dependence of

the media business on sexually oriented content has grown so steadily these past thirty years that it has created the very climate in which Starr could issue such a report — the same matter-of-fact climate that will, end of the day, allow us to forgive Bill Clinton.

In taking on *The New York Times Book Review*, which he finds boring beyond belief, Wolff writes: "What's happened here? Hello? You're not even trying." Even *The New York Times*'s celebrated R. W. Apple comes in for a shot. Wolff writes that Apple, who had been covering the impeachment proceedings under the rubric *In the Chamber*, "Is not, and never has been, in the chamber during the trial."

Perhaps Wolff's funniest column concerned that most unfunny of men, Steven Brill, the founder and former editor-in-chief of *Brill's Content*. Not long after the publication of Wolff's memoir of his failed Internet start-up, Wolff discovers that he is being investigated by a young reporter for Brill's magazine. Indeed, the young reporter suggests that it would be in Wolff's best interest if he would turn over all his book notes. Wolff not only demurs but turns the tables on Brill and writes about the experience. He claims that Brill wants to become nothing less than the "independent prosecutor of information." Wolff suggests that such an idea could be quite valuable, "sort of Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. *We in the Brill Labs have tested this nonfiction product and find that its sourcing methods and general probity conform to our standards.*" In other words, Wolff is conjecturing that Brill's real intent is a pure money-play on the World Wide Web. At first, one assumes Wolff is making a good joke at Brill's expense. But he presses on. He suggests that Brill could "partner" with others to provide the editorial "brand" on the vast streams of content running through the global network. This is a joke, right?

And yet, in early February, Brill had formed several partnerships with the very industry players whom he intends to cover, among them CBS, NBC, Primedia. The proposed Web site, reported Kuczynski in *The New York Times*, "will allow consumers to search across categories for subject matter and allow them to rely on guidance from experts, said Steven Brill, chairman of Brill Media Holdings and the editor of *Brill's Content*. For example, Clay Felker, a former editor of *New York* magazine, will offer his opinion on which magazines are worth reading, and which not." *We in the Brill Labs have tested this nonfiction product and find that its sourcing methods and general probity conform to our standards.*" As we were saying, Michael Wolff is a media critic who truly has his finger on the new Internet Zeitgeist. ■

Jonathan Z. Larsen is a former editor of *New Times* and *The Village Voice*.

the internet

A thousand voices bloom

THE MEDIA CRITICS



BY JAMES LEDBETTER

One of the dreams of the Internet was that it would allow almost anyone to become a publisher. It's debatable whether or not that dream will ever be meaningfully realized, but it certainly seems that anyone who ever wanted to be a media critic can now do it easily online.

There are hundreds, and probably thousands of sites on the Internet that republish mainstream media snippets, often with comment and analysis. The better known Webzines, such as *Slate* and *Salon*, approach the task with familiar professionalism reminiscent of print media, but a wide variety of more obscure sites offer individual takes on media coverage that range from crude to erudite.

Why has media criticism flourished online? In part, it's because magazines of media criticism — notably this one and the *American Journalism Review* — have not been especially aggressive in their approach to the Web. It's difficult to find even the complete contents of either magazine on their respective Web sites, and neither produces much content original to the Web. The newer *Brill's Content* does offer some Web-only material, but it, too, treats the Web site as secondary to the magazine. (This reflects the old-media fear that free, online offerings will dilute paid, real-world circulation.)

Secondly, the Web has helped bring many traditional media analysts to a wider audience. This includes not only mainstream critics, such as *The Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz, but also organizations that devote themselves to media analysis. Chief among these are the ones that come at the press through a particular ideological lens — such as the right-wing Media Research Center and the left-wing Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR). For those groups, the Web distributes their critiques more widely and quickly than their newsletters ever could; their fans can quickly repackage material on their own sites by linking to them.

There has also been a proliferation of media reporting and criticism that exists solely on the Net. Both *Slate* and *Salon* are saturated with

Jim Romenesko's MediaNews

Tuesday, February 8, 2000

High school student journalist's film
analyst Leandro Leon says South Dade High School's security
film is an accurate observation after he took reference from a source

JIM ROMENESKO'S
MEDIANEWS.COM
On the strength of
links, it has grown
from cult site to
a Poynter-owned,
must-read.

Powerful Media

www.powerfulmedia.com

ONLINE JOURNALISM
POWERFULMEDIA.COM
Big money, big names.
The latest entry in the
vertical news site explosion
is coming soon.



ONLINE JOURNALISM
REVIEW
Small audience, slim
niche, but this online critic
of online media has its
eye on the horizon.

Slate
today's papers

SLATE'S TODAY'S PAPERS Summary sprinkled with analysis of how the biggest papers handled that day's news

media-focused stories and tidbits; some, like Timothy Noah's Chatterbox, exhibit an arch playfulness that is difficult to achieve in print. But true junkies turn to the site run by Jim Romenesko: *MediaNews* (formerly known as *MediaGossip*). The site takes advantage of one of the Web's great strengths: external links. In fact, the site — which links to dozens of mainstream and alternative media sources — is almost exclusively an aggregation of material that appears elsewhere. In a kind of aw-shucks purism, Romenesko declines even to discuss how many readers he has; "numbers don't matter to me," he says. But his success at reaching the niche of America's media elite allowed him last summer to quit his day job at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and produce a slightly slicker version of *MediaGossip*, *MediaNews*, on behalf of the Poynter Institute.

One tremendous advantage online media critics enjoy is timeliness. The all-too-familiar nightmare of the magazine media writer or critic is to work for several days on a story or item, only to see it end up in a daily newspaper the day of your deadline.

On the Internet, as soon as you're ready to publish, you can publish. When most Web sites are working at maximum capacity, their editing-to-publishing cycle is usually a matter of minutes. "You never have to worry about being scooped," says Susan Lehman, who edited and wrote media stories for *Salon.com* for three and a half years. Despite that advantage, there are comparatively few sites with paid staff dedicated to reporting original media analysis and criticism. One that does is the *Online Journalism Review* (www.ojr.org), which is affiliated with the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. *OJR* was launched in March 1998 and features regular commentary from veteran newsman Robert Scheer. The site publishes between three and five news stories a month, and has a small audience by Web standards: under 100,000 page views a month. *OJR* managing editor Joshua Fouts says that his

site distinguishes itself from its print competitors because it's the Net writing about the Net: "We focus exclusively on the global development of online journalism — journalism which uses the Internet as its delivery system," Fouts says.

It's significant that none of the Web-specific media reporting and criticism sites stands alone as a business; *OJR* is nonprofit, and Romenesko's sites have thrived only because he has spent thousands of unpaid hours building and updating them. This spring, a New York-based Web outfit called Powerful Media plans to launch a news site devoted to original reporting and commentary on the media, entertainment, publishing, and Internet businesses. Headed by former *New York* editor Kurt Andersen and former *Spin* editor Michael Hirschorn, the site has already attracted millions of dollars in venture capital and journalists with tons of experience reporting on the media business. But its viability as a business is far from proven.

Curiously, the one area where Internet media criticism has already proven self-sustaining is e-mail newsletters. Many publications (including my own) have found them to be a hit. Typically, e-mail newsletters strike a balance between summarizing the news and critiquing it. For many, the model is *Slate's Today's Papers*, a daily digest of how the nation's biggest newspapers cover that day's stories. The feature, written by Scott Shuger, has had the unfortunate experience of falling between the site's paid and free circula-



SALON MEDIA:
News and criticism done with old-media professionalism at a new-media pace.

mediachannel
eye on global media

MEDIACHANNEL.ORG: A new non-profit, public interest site, launched February 3. Its slogan: "As the media watch the world, we watch the media."

tion strategies, but it remains one of *Slate's* most popular attractions. It currently has about 42,000 daily subscribers, and receives an additional 500,000 monthly page views on the Web site. The e-mail newsletter is like a friendly parasite, living off the host of traditional reporters' work. Theoretically, the newspapers and Web sites publishing the original stories could be concerned about losing readers to such newsletters. *The Industry Standard's* Media Grok deals with that by including links to the original stories, encouraging readers who want more information to go directly to individual Web pages. That's helpful to readers, but it also placates turf-conscious reporters; not only do most of them not object to having pieces included in Grok — they frequently lobby for it.

The popularity of online media writing is helping to reshape what is meant by media criticism. Some argue that the limited time that most readers spend on individual Internet sites — usually just a few minutes per visit — favors short, snappy nuggets of writing, as opposed to more investigative or analytic material. *MediaNews*, for example, picks up items of criticism and links directly to columns of media criticism (such as those in *The Nation* and *Boston Phoenix*), but it's difficult to label the site as "criticism." *Today's Papers'* Shuger says he sees his function primarily as news summary, although he adds: "If a day's papers warrants meta criticism, then I do it. Fortunately, most days there is something meta worth saying."

It's also possible, though, that Internet media criticism is, like so much of the Net, simply in its infancy. The Internet has yet to produce a single source of media criticism as popular as, say, Matt Drudge. Perhaps that's because the audience for quality media criticism is naturally limited. But it may also be because no site has yet combined the most compelling advantages of the Net with intelligent, vibrant criticism — and the reporting resources needed to back it up. ■

alternative papers

Lively watchdogs of the local mainstream media

BY JAMES B. KELLEHER

Surely, the biggest media story in the country last year was the uncovering of the secret profit-sharing deal between the *Los Angeles Times* and the Staples Center. The scandal got legs when it appeared in *The New York Times* and then *The Wall Street Journal*.

But who broke it? The *Los Angeles Business Journal*, it's true, first reported that a special issue of the *Los Angeles Times*'s Sunday magazine was the result of an "unusual marketing partnership." But the fact that newspaper and story subject were sharing income from that special issue was first exposed by "The Finger," a column in the alternative weekly *New Times Los Angeles*, written by its editor, Rick Barrs. The *Times*, Barrs wrote, agreed to "split profits from the Staples Center issue with, uh, the Staples Center."

Yet, in his mammoth excavation of the scandal at the end of December, the *Times*'s own David Shaw wrote that many *Times* journalists discounted The Finger's exposé because Barrs's column is "so often mistaken and malicious."

Perhaps they did. But he got this story right and, in the process, demonstrated two truisms about media criticism in the alternative press.

Number 1: Some of the sharpest reporting about the mainstream press these days is coming out of the nation's thriving alternative weeklies. Taken as a whole, the alternatives may do as much to keep mainstream dailies honest as CJR, *Brill's Content*, and AJR combined.

Number 2: The alternative critics rarely get the respect they deserve, in part because of the slash-and-burn approach so many of them favor.

"Who cares if The Finger yells and calls names?" says Jack Shafer, the deputy editor at *Slate* and the former editor and press critic at the weekly *Washington City Paper*. "This is in the finest tradition of American newspapering. American newspapering really shouldn't be a Montessori school. If you've got the facts and you've got the arguments, I don't care if you're hysterical."

From The Finger in L.A. to the original

model, *The Village Voice* in New York, media watchdogs at the country's freewheeling alternatives can be short on collegiality and long on venom. But, as Jim Romenesko, who scours the alternatives for his MediaNews site out of the Poynter Institute, says, "The alternatives are heavy on attitude and often smart-assed. They won't hesitate to use blind quotes from disgruntled employees. But they're entertaining and frequently effective. Their strength is watching what's going on close to home and spreading the word."

Of course, sometimes the antics go too far. This summer, the *SF Weekly*, the Bay Area title of the New Times chain, decided to tweak the *San Francisco Examiner* by creating a plausible-sounding housing advocacy group and staging a fake rally, which the daily dutifully covered. The incident gave *SF Weekly* editor John Mecklin and managing editor Laurel Wellman an opportunity to hammer the *Examiner*. But is fabricating a story really a good idea?

At the other end of the scale, perhaps, is Frank Lewis's thoughtful cover piece in Philadelphia's *City Paper* on problems at *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, a story Romenesko calls "one of the best pieces of 1999." Excess aside, the alternatives have helped break or advance many important press stories.

Of the 119 papers that are members of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, "probably half" have full-time media writers, says Patricia Calhoun, the president of AAN and the editor of *Westword*, the New Times paper in Denver. "No matter how limited your resources are, the chances are good that you'll be able to find a smart free-lancer in your town who can pay attention to what's going on in the media," Calhoun says.

One reason these columns are so popular is that many dailies themselves have neither ombudsmen to cover themselves and their own blind spots and foibles, nor TV critics to watchdog local TV news. And certainly local TV does almost no press criticism. The alternatives rush to fill a vacuum.

"To the extent that alternative newsweeklies have a strong news function, that's one of them," says David Carr, the editor and press critic at the *Washington City Paper*. "If I see an alternative paper that isn't tracking local media, I view that franchise as somehow crippled or stupid."

Most of the alternatives seek to do more than just critically review their local dailies or print the gripes of staffers. The best of them point out overlooked angles and obvious distortions in the dailies. The good ones put more emphasis on reporting and show an openness to printing stories that note when the dailies do things right.

Although the media critics, like their free-



BOSTON UNIVERSITY PHOTO SERVICES



Dan Kennedy has critiqued the media for *The Boston Phoenix* since 1994 with a balanced, ruminative, reasoned approach.



Rick Barrs, a former editor at the *Los Angeles Times*, edits *New Times Los Angeles* and writes *The Finger*, its column without rules. The Finger pokes a lot of eyeballs and favors a caustic tone, but it also breaks some news.

wheeling publications, resist easy categorization, two general approaches to the beat predominate.

The first is the balanced, ruminative, reasoned approach favored by Michael Miner at the *Chicago Reader* and Dan Kennedy at *The Boston Phoenix* — papers and writers that have achieved a comfortable level of respect in their communities during their years in the job. It's a respect that Kennedy earned, in part, with his handling of the Mike Barnicle affair a few years back. In the case of Miner, who has been on the beat at the *Reader* for twenty years, the admiration may be an outgrowth of his palpable love for what he does.

"I think journalism is pretty wonderful and that the Chicago papers, despite what's wrong with them, are pretty good," says Miner, who worked at the *Chicago Sun-Times* before moving over to the *Reader*. "I have the feeling that I'm never as angry as I should be. I don't bring any kind of an agenda or theory of journalism to what I write beyond the idea that journalism is just a great bazaar of conflicting interests and values."

The second approach, perfected in the columns of the eleven-paper *New Times* chain, is a bomb-throwing, hyperventilating style that has reached its apotheosis in the column in *Phoenix New Times* called "The Flash," which describes itself as "the self-appointed hall monitor of *The Arizona Republic*." The Flash has adopted a terrifying scorched-earth policy toward the daily, skewering it every day on the weekly's Web pages, followed by regular floggings in the print version.

Jeremy Voas, the editor of *Phoenix New Times*, concedes that The Flash's voice is "decidedly cynical. Actually, it's downright haughty," he says. "But how else should one view an institution such as *The Arizona Republic*, whose idea of investigative reporting is to issue FOI requests to see all FOI requests filed by *New Times* reporters?"

The daily autopsies are ambitious, and not universally popular. Even Mike Lacey, president of the paper's parent, admits he's "not an enormous fan" of The Flash. He says he prefers less opinion and more reporting in his reading.

For all their differences, the media critics at the alternatives are strikingly similar in some surprising ways. They are mostly white and male. And they betray the print reporter's reflexive bias against television, heavily skewing their coverage toward the local dailies. "To cover local news I would have to watch it," explains Carr, of the *Washington City Paper*, "and there are certain sacrifices I'm not willing to make. You want low-hanging fruit? With local TV, most of that stuff is already sit-

local reviews: sole survivor

When *St. Louis Journalism Review*

Review published its first issue in October 1970, other local journalism reviews were at work in Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, Holyoke, Honolulu, Long Beach, New York City, Philadelphia, Providence, and Topeka.

Today, *SJR* is the sole survivor.

Through the first month in the new century, it had published 222 issues, and has remained true to its feisty and somewhat quirky roots.

A local magazine publisher, Charles L. Klotzer, started it partly to enlighten readers about important issues that news organizations suppress or ignore. But mostly, *SJR* critiqued the St. Louis media, and hard. Today the contents are similarly hard-hitting. With paid circulation hovering around 1,300, *SJR* runs on a shoestring, and, sometimes, you get what you pay for. The writing rarely sparkles, the haphazard editing can be distractingly bad, the layout is unattractive, the newsprint brittle.

All that said, the twenty pages of *SJR*, arriving ten times a year, are rarely boring and often raise issues that cry for attention. IS PREDICTING THE

RETURN OF CHRIST FRONT-PAGE NEWS? asked a recent headline, over a story about heavy Post-



Dispatch coverage of the local arrival of the Billy Graham Crusade. ASHCROFT TRIES TO DUPE TV AUDIENCES was about how a U.S. senator from Missouri uses congressional video services to feed mock news interviews to local broadcast outlets, some of whom run them without telling viewers of their origin. These days, the hottest features are about civic (a.k.a. public) journalism at the *Post-Dispatch*. Most of the contributors to *SJR* despise the movement, and believe that the *Post-Dispatch*'s editor-in-chief, Cole Campbell, has employed its philosophy to ruin what's left of a once-great newspaper. *SJR* tends to portray the debate over civic journalism in tones of stark black and white, rather than nuanced and gray. Some readers might see *SJR*'s contribution to the discussion about civic journalism as praiseworthy. That's debatable. It can be pretty shrill. But the publication's excellent coverage mix — newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, and p.r./advertising — is something to praise. So is *SJR*'s fearlessness. Finally, even a detractor has to marvel at how Klotzer and company keep on keeping on.

Steve Weinberg, a contributing editor to CJR, has never missed an issue of *St. Louis Journalism Review*.

ting on the ground rotting. Kicking it around is no source of joy for me. I guess I don't really believe those guys are really in the same business."

But there are exceptions. One of the smarter pieces of 1999 came from the *L.A. Weekly*, where writer Steven Mikulan wrote a 7,000-word dissection of the seven Los Angeles area English-language news programs ("L.A.'s Low Definition TV Journalism," *L.A. Weekly*, December 24-30).

Rich Connelly, the *New Times* press critic in Houston who writes the "News Hostage" column, has also kept his eye trained on local TV. He was the first to report about Cynthia Hunt, the Houston TV reporter who sent fawning letters to suspected serial killer Angel Maturino Resendiz, along with photos of herself, in a bid to get an exclusive interview.

Connally also keeps a keen eye on the *Houston Chronicle*, which has operated without competition since April 1995, when the *Post* closed, transforming Houston into the nation's biggest one-paper town.

"In most American cities, the daily newspaper is a monopoly," says *Slate's* Jack Shafer. "It has ceased to be just a daily newspaper and become an institution. The press critics at the alternative dailies do what no one else will do. They write biting, skeptical, honest stories that demystify that institution — that show the interests, biases, and human foibles behind it." ■

academia

Practical scholars and other agenda setters

BY ROY PETER CLARK

Academic criticism of the media, from universities and think tanks, is widely dismissed by working stiffs, some of whom can't wait to quit the news business to join the critics. This dismissal should not be misunderstood. It is more ritualistic than heartfelt, more tribal than professional. Reporters may act as if attacks on journalism go in one ear and out the other, but a well-aimed dart may hit a few brain cells on its flight.

Consider these influential critics who have come from the academy:

- Noam Chomsky, one of the century's great linguists, argues that the American media, dominated by business interests, limit the range of political debate in America, especially perspectives on the left.
- Presidential scholar James David Barber urged the press to go beyond the horse race and take into account a candidate's biography as a predictor of service.
- Kathleen Hall Jamieson is among those who continue to study political campaigns, revealing the manipulative ways they are run and covered.
- Michael Schudson discourages journalists from adopting any simplistic notions of objectivity or citizenship. His work as a historian reveals the ways ideas about the press and its purposes evolve.
- Philip Meyer, once a journalist himself, continues to encourage journalists to expand their investigative workbench to include the tools of social science research.
- Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his carefully crafted analyses of American culture and history, challenges journalists to understand the limitations of mainstream reporting and commentary on communities that differ from their own.
- James Carey studies the stories journalists tell about themselves and reveals their strengths and weaknesses. He also makes the case that some journalistic story forms, created in previous generations, have outlived their usefulness to contemporary democratic life.
- Ben Bagdikian, another former journalist, critiques forms of media ownership and their influence on news coverage, a stream of criticism that has been advanced to the global level by Robert W. McChesney.



THE MEDIA CRITICS



HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.
Challenges journalistic limits



JAMES CAREY
Looking for
new story forms



JAY ROSEN
Takes case
to practitioners

I call those critics "practical scholars." They have counterparts within news or journalism-based organizations, whom I call "reflective practitioners." They include the likes of E.J. Dionne, Jr., David Broder, Jonathan Alter, Michael Janeway, Tom Rosenstiel, and Bill Kovach. Together the scholars and journalists form a powerful force for change within journalism. Some work for a "restoration" of journalism values. Others seek more of a "reformation." Both groups find the status quo unacceptable.

It would be hard to find a scholar/critic whose work has been more influential than New York University's Jay Rosen. His new book *What Are Journalists For?* (CJR, November/December) tells the story of his journey of discovery from Buffalo news intern, to journalism professor, to one of the leaders of the public journalism movement.

His story is instructive for those scholars who seek to influence the practice of daily journalism. For Rosen was not content to drop off prints of scholarly articles from a hot air balloon. Instead, he hooked up with sympathetic partners in the field, who found in Rosen's ideas the seeds for solving some powerful problems: disintegrating communities, declining readership, and cynicism in the newsroom. Rosen's willingness to immerse himself in the practice of journalists, to learn their routines and conventional frames for telling stories, intensified the power of his ideas.

Rosen's takes on journalism and democracy shook the press and inflamed critics. His ability to avoid being ignored was the result of his considerable gifts as a speaker, writer, listener, thinker, and debater. But Rosen was also a chancer to journalists of a significant stream of scholarship, from John Dewey to James Carey. Unlike the pessimistic Walter Lippmann, Dewey and Carey who followed him argued that public life could be improved through communication and conversation, and that journalists could play a formative role.

An odder example of the influence of academic criticism of the press comes from the continuing work of a retired English professor from the University of New Hampshire. Donald M. Murray is seventy-five years old and worked on only four books last year. In 1954 he was the youngest person ever to win a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing, and he still writes a column for *The Boston Globe*. Both Rosen and Murray draw maps that other scholarly critics might follow: climb down from your steed and jog in the fields; link the library to the workshop; challenge journalists with ideas tied to techniques; and don't be afraid when they run away. Journalists run dashes, not marathons. Eventually you'll catch them. ■

ombudsman

Monitoring yourself

BY JOSH GETLIN

On a bright March afternoon in 1998, fans were pouring out of a high school championship basketball game in Philadelphia when gunfire rang out, sparking panic in the crowd. Police quickly shot and killed a man who had sprayed the University of Pennsylvania campus with gunfire, and a photographer snapped a picture of the shooter as he lay on the ground.

That photo wound up on page one of the next day's *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the newspaper instantly had a public relations crisis on its hands: angry readers, many of them African-American, said the paper would not have run a similar picture of a white victim, while others blasted the paper for being insensitive and resorting to sensationalism.

The *Inquirer* stuck to its guns, saying the picture conveyed a shocking but important news story. Yet rather than being merely defensive, the paper's two ombudsmen tried to reach out to readers — letting them vent their anger and publicly acknowledging the debate over the grisly photo.

"Sometimes newspapers have to report some very unpleasant events, and we have to take the heat for it if we believe we have made the right decision," said deputy editor Gene Foreman, in a column by Arlene Morgan, the paper's assistant managing editor for readership. Meanwhile, *Inquirer* ombudsman John Bull fielded a flood of angry calls, "many from people who were screaming and cursing," he recalled. "But I think we put out the message that we were trying to be fair."

The perception of fairness and accountability is hugely important at a time when, according to one study after another, public faith in media accuracy is eroding. For a growing number of newspapers, hiring an ombudsman to act as a middleman between the public and the news organization is seen as an important step — not only for better public relations, but for improving the accuracy of daily news.

Although there are only a handful of ombudsmen working today at the nation's estimated 1,489 dailies (37 are listed as members of the Organization of News Om-



THE MEDIA CRITICS

ombudsmen on ombudsmen

GENEVA OVERHOLSER

"Obviously you don't want to change your newspaper according to every complaint that every reader makes. But somewhere between the public relations value of having an ombudsman and capitulating to every criticism is a very thoughtful place — a place where you do take seriously criticism that you wouldn't agree with in the first place. This is the delicate balance that editors try to strike for more accountability in their community."

MIRIAM POPPER

"Some ombudsmen become a Darth Vader character at the paper, someone who's always fielding reader complaints and bringing reporters and editors bad news. You try to keep up relations and open up the lines of communication, but this is known for good reason as one of the loneliest jobs in the newsroom. It's just a fact of life."

MARK JURKOWITZ

"To many readers, newspapers remain a dark and mysterious place where conspiracies are hatched daily, and we don't explain ourselves very well. Readers can be very creative about why they think things happen at newspapers, and some of the ideas they come up with could be turned into Hollywood scripts. You calm people down just by talking to them."

budsmen, a Sacramento-based group that has been operating since 1980) their number has been growing in recent years. They occupy positions of varying clout at some of the nation's biggest metropolitan papers — including *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *Miami Herald*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Kansas City Star*, *Hartford Courant*, *Orange County Register*, and the *Inquirer*.

The structure of the job differs from one organization to the next: Some ombudsmen are hired for a limited time and function as outsiders critiquing the newspaper, a long-standing tradition at *The Washington Post*. Others are hired permanently as reader representatives (as at *The Miami Herald*) and play more of a grass-roots role, working as intermediaries between the public and the newsroom. Some answer to editors, others to publishers; some write columns listing readers' complaints, while many ombudsmen function more behind the scenes.

Their duties range from fielding criticisms about coverage to participation in community outreach programs and other efforts explaining how and why a newspaper made a decision. On occasion, ombudsmen have participated in some of the most controversial debates roiling the newspaper profession — as when the *Post's* William Green produced an epic and widely praised account of how his newspaper came to publish "Jimmy's World," a Pulitzer Prize-winning 1981 account of a child heroin addict that was later discovered to be fictitious.

Despite these differing responsibilities, ombudsmen share a mandate to increase their paper's public accountability. This has been the case ever since the *Louisville Courier-Journal* became the first U.S. newspaper to hire an ombudsman in 1967. The paper created the post partially in response to an *Esquire* article by media critic Ben Bagdikian, who warned that newspapers' accountability was threatened by the increasing acquisition of family-owned papers by private conglomerates.

If anything, such fears are more pronounced today, yet some papers — including *The New York Times* — have chosen not to hire ombudsmen, contending that the job of responding to readers and explaining a newspaper's daily actions is best handled by the paper's editors. Other organizations have refused to hire ombudsmen for purely financial reasons, finding it a lower priority than increasing the size of the editorial staff.

"If a publisher gave me a potful of money to buy three new bodies for the newsroom, I'd be strongly tempted to hire two new

CONTINUED ON PAGE 65

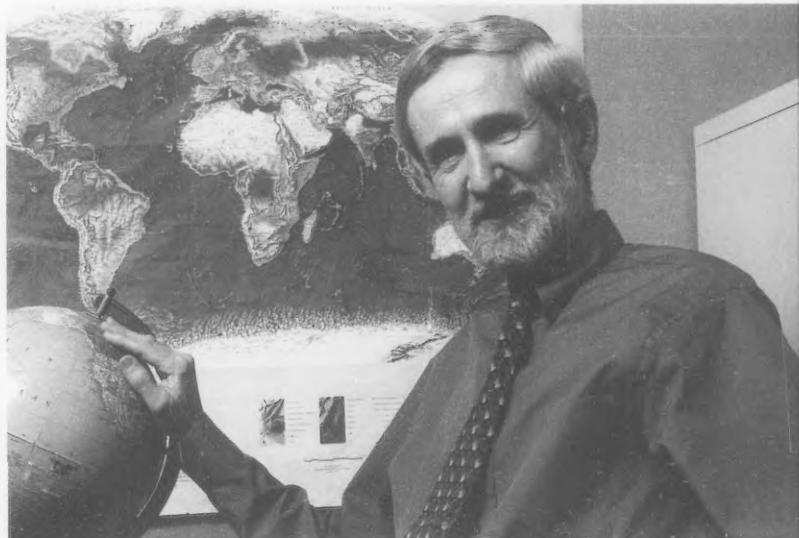
Covering the Climate: Beware of False Conflict

Expert Witness features top thinkers in other professions commenting on journalistic coverage of their world. In this issue, John Wallace is interviewed about global warming by Frank Houston, a Brooklyn writer who specializes in science.

You have written that where global warming is concerned, the media, "in their well intended efforts to air opposing points of view . . . tend to accentuate differences of opinion," and that this enables propagandists to create a false impression of conflict. Can you explain what you mean by this?

■ Seeking out and presenting contrasting opinions is just as important in scientific reporting as in other spheres. However, it's often not so much a matter of offering a balanced presentation of opposing points of view as illuminating a variety of scientific perspectives which may be distinct from one another without necessarily being contradictory. Many science reporters take this part of their job seriously and are very good at it. Problems arise when writers fail to distinguish between subtle differences in opinion and diametrically opposing views; when they include or place undue weight on the views of individuals who are not qualified to offer informed scientific opinions; and when they fail to make a clear distinction between scientific opinion and political opinion.

There are a lot of lobbyists and others with strong points of view who don't always deal with the nuances that responsible scientists do. Reporters inexperienced in dealing with the subject area are particularly prone to these problems because they don't know who to call upon for impartial scientific advice, and they're often unaware of the broader scientific and political context of the story they are writing. The fact that they're writing under



JOHN M. WALLACE is a professor in the Department of Atmospheric Sciences and co-director of the University of Washington Program on the Environment. He served as chairman of an independent panel of the National Academy of Sciences' National Research Council, which produced an influential report on global warming in January. Wallace's research specialties include the study of atmospheric general circulation, El Niño, and global climate.

He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences; a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Geophysical Union, and the American Meteorological Society; and a recipient of the AMS Rossby medal and AGU Revelle medal. His favorite high school teacher once advised him to go into journalism, and that if that didn't work, to try science. He received his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1966 and has taught at the University of Washington ever since.

pressure of tight deadlines doesn't help.

In some cases there's also a tendency for the press and particularly the high profile news media to pander to the public's fascination with debate and controversy for its own sake. My favorite example involves an incident that took place during the 1996 annual meeting of the American Meteorological Society in

Atlanta on a day when a major winter storm was making headline news. As rain poured down upon Atlanta in advance of the approaching Arctic blast, a young woman reporter from the local NBC station appeared on the scene and asked the executive director of the society, Richard Hallgren, if he would be willing to find her two meteorologists who would stage a

debate for the evening network news. Her news director wanted one to argue that this storm was a consequence of global warming and the other to take the position that it had nothing to do with global warming. Hallgren warned her that no reputable meteorologist would argue that global warming orchestrates weather events, but offered to find two experts who would have interesting things to say on the subject. He asked George Philander of Princeton University and me to meet with her to see if we could work something out. After our fifteen-minute audition failed to produce the desired level of acrimony, Philander and I were dismissed, and the reporter expressed the network's disappointment to Hallgren for not delivering what it wanted, and left. She appeared a few hours later on the evening news, standing outside the conference hotel, huddled under an umbrella for protection from the drenching rain. She reported that she had just been inside the hotel interviewing the meteorologists as to whether they thought the featured storm was a consequence of global warming, and some thought it was and some thought it wasn't. There's no stopping a determined news director!

How does the report of the National Research Council (NRC) panel that you recently chaired figure into this story?

■ The NRC asked our panel to assess the state of the science relating to the monitoring of global temperature trends. We concluded that the warming indicated by the surface measurements is real and drew attention to the physical difference between the temperature trend at ground level and the corresponding trend in the atmospheric layer monitored by the satellites.

Have the panel's findings been reported accurately in the press?

■ By and large, I've been impressed with the genuine interest displayed by the journalists covering the story and by the accuracy of their articles. They challenged our panel with hard questions and, with very few exceptions, were willing to report our findings and recommendations in the way that we intended.

Are there any articles that were particularly exemplary?

■ Colin Macilwain's article in *Nature*



DOES GLOBAL WARMING REALLY EXIST?

Human activities have affected the global climate during the past thirty years, causing the stratosphere to cool significantly and the ozone layer to thin. There is a consensus about that. A majority of climate experts also believe that human activities have also contributed to a warming trend at the earth's surface.

Getting to a consensus on that point is not as straightforward as you might think. One reason: from 1945 to the late 1970s, the Northern Hemisphere experienced a weak cooling trend. Some scientists thought that aerosols might be the cause of it, while others thought it might be a manifestation of some kind of long-term cycle. Cooling trends in surface observations from the '50s to the '70s stimulated a flurry of popular articles and cartoons (one shown above) half-seriously suggesting that the cooling trend might portend a coming ice age. Ten years later, James Hansen (head of the NASA/Goddard Institute for Space Studies) argued persuasively in congressional testimony that the global climate was warming and that the buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere was responsible. This warming was documented extensively in a 1990 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. A subsequent 1995 report issued by the IPCC showed that the warming was continuing and went on to conclude that "the balance of evidence suggests a discernible human influence on global climate."

When the 1995 IPCC report went to press, not all scientists were convinced that the warming at the earth's surface was real. Satellite measurements of the lowest layer of the atmosphere reported in 1993 indicated little, if any, warming since the first of a series of microwave-sounding instruments was put in place in December 1978. These findings aroused considerable scientific controversy, and have been widely cited by global warming skeptics and naysayers as evidence that the surface measurements are flawed and, more generally, to take issue with the IPCC's pronouncement that human activities are influencing climate. It was this controversy that prompted the National Resource Council to commission a report from the panel that I chaired. The report, released January 13, reaffirmed that the global warming indicated by the surface observations during the past twenty years is real.

—John Wallace

[1/20] is among the best at placing our findings in a broader scientific and political context. I also liked the way he relied on scientists for scientific opinions and upon policy experts for assessments of how our report is (or is not) likely to influence the policy debate on global warming. Our panel members intentionally steered clear of policy questions because we have no particular expertise in that arena. An informative Associated Press article by Josef Hebert [1/13] was instrumental in providing nationwide press coverage of the story, and articles by the *Houston Chronicle's* Bill Dawson [1/13] provided valuable additional details. Richard Harris's in-depth coverage of the report and its ramifications on National Public Radio was excellent and I've heard good reports about CNN's coverage.

Were there any notable problems with the press coverage of your report?

■ The most serious problems were related to headlines and copy editing. Alarmist headlines like GLOBAL WARMING REAL AND WORSENING [Reuters 1/13], PANEL: GLOBAL WARMING HAS ACCELERATED [USA Today 1/13], and EARTH REPORT SHOWS ACCELERATED WARMING [The New York Times 1/13] convey the impression that our panel found the rate of global warming to be more rapid than had previously been believed, whereas in reality it only reaffirmed that the warming reported in countless news articles dating back to 1988 is real.

What should journalists make of scientists who engage in political commentary?

■ It seems to me that relatively few of the scientists who engage extensively in political commentary are genuinely interested in and curious about climate variability with all its ambiguities and uncertainties. At heart, most of them are debaters, more interested in advancing a particular set of beliefs about the environment than advancing the state of environmental science. Journalists who allow the ongoing debate between these alarmists and naysayers in the scientific community to dominate and frame their coverage of global warming are likely to miss out on the really new developments in the science, which are not amenable to such simplistic characterizations.

Did the press do anything to present an illusion of conflict in the coverage of your NRC report?

■ One example is a quote from Arthur Robinson, a chemist affiliated with the

Oregon Institute of Science and Medicine: "This report proves that the NRC has been taken over by enviros," which appeared in *The Washington Post* [1/13] and a number of other newspapers. The rapid-fire nature and puzzling content of Robinson's statement leaves me wondering whether he had even read our report or even knew of the identity and credentials of its authors and reviewers when he was questioned by reporters. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Robinson didn't pick up on this theme in an op-ed piece that he co-authored for the editorial section of *The Wall Street Journal* a few days later. More generally, one could question whether an individual whose contributions to the global warming debate have largely been in the political arena should have been called upon by reporters to critique a document whose content is exclusively scientific.

Are reporters getting any better at sorting out the issues?

■ Within the past month two reporters have remarked to me that they no longer feel compelled to include quotes from greenhouse-warming skeptics or naysayers in all their articles and media coverage of this issue. By exempting themselves from the requirement to present both sides of the story in every article (as if both sides always existed and were equally worthy of consideration), they are assuming more personal responsibility for providing balanced news coverage. I see this practice as a plus for science reporting to the extent that the journalists who engage in it are fair-minded and well-informed, and that they insist on maintaining a clear distinction between scientific opinion and political opinion.

Do you have any other comments regarding the press coverage of climate related topics?

■ It seems to me that press releases exert a surprising amount of influence upon what gets reported. For example, articles published in *Science* or *Nature*, which impose embargoes on articles that have been accepted for publication and issue press releases in advance of the publication of each new issue, tend to receive a disproportionate amount of press coverage in relation to their significance. Journalists may not be aware that many scientists are hesitant to submit their most newsworthy articles to these high-profile, highly selective, interdisci-

plinary journals for fear they will be rejected and because they resent the temporary loss of control implicit in the embargo agreement. In a similar manner, the work of scientists in the larger, more affluent universities and research laboratories with large and aggressive public relations offices tends to get more than its share of press coverage.

A recent example of the power of a press office is the January 19 release of a story by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory showing how the pattern of sea level over the Pacific Ocean has been distorted by the recent two-year long "La Niña" event. To justify the newsworthiness of the satellite images produced by scientists at the lab, the news release indicated that they could be signaling the onset of several decades of the cold phase of the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, which would have implications for global-mean temperature and for climate over the United States. The story appeared on the front page of *The Washington Post* [1/20] under the headline U.S. MAY BE ENTERING NEW WEATHER ERA and there were similar articles in many newspapers around the country and in *Time* magazine. One can picture a reader wondering, "Do the scientists really have their act together? Just a week ago they were warning of accelerated global warming and now they're hinting that the next few decades are going to be cooler." The fact that the scientists quoted in the article disavowed the predictive value of the satellite imagery did little to counteract the message conveyed by the headlines, nor did the lack of any quantitative estimate of the amount of projected cooling, which turns out to be small in comparison to the rise in global mean surface temperature over the past twenty years.

In my experience, the best science reporters take notice of press releases but they don't allow them to dictate what they write about. They often generate story ideas of their own based on perusing the scientific literature and conversations with their own personal network of working scientists.

Do scientists mind being bothered by these calls from journalists?

■ The journalists aren't the only ones who profit from these conversations. Interacting with journalists forces scientists to think more critically about the manner in which they communicate their findings and in some cases they can even uncover significant research issues that deserve to be addressed. ■

The Television News Show Kids Watch Most

BY STEVEN MANNING

As the opening graphics disappear and the introductory music fades, two young, hiply dressed anchors sit on an elevated platform in a futuristic studio filled with computers and monitors, and read the day's news.

Anchor Derrick Shore introduces a report on AT&T's agreement to allow other Internet providers access to its high-speed digital cable lines. "When you try to log on to the Internet, does it seem to take forever to get connected?" Shore asks. "This decision could change all that." When he finishes, advertisements flash for Polaroid digital cameras, Nintendo computer games, and a Clearasil acne cleanser. Next, co-anchor Gotham Chopra offers a feature on whether parents should be penalized if their kids play hooky from school. Then comes another round of ads for Pantene shampoo, Extra Classic Bubble Gum, and America Online.

The opening minutes of a typical evening's local news broadcast? Not exactly. Welcome to the homeroom news channel at Clifton High School in Clifton, New Jersey, where every morning at 7:45, 2,800 students tune in to Channel One, the in-the-classroom commercial television network. Each day, Channel One is beamed via satellite to about 12,000 middle and high schools across the United States. The twelve-minute news program, including two minutes of ads, reaches more than eight million students, or about one-third of all teenagers. That is about five times the number of teens who watch newscasts on ABC, NBC, CBS, and CNN combined. In fact, it's probably safe to say that Channel One is the largest source of news for teenagers in America today. "My students don't read newspapers or watch television news programs," says Clifton High teacher Kathleen Ryan, as her twenty-three sophomores stare raptly at a television set mounted high up on a wall. "This is the main way students learn about current



Kathleen Ryan's homeroom class at Clifton High School: All eyes on Channel One

events and about what news reporting is all about. Channel One reporters are role models for the kids."

That's exactly the problem, says Channel One's growing chorus of vocal critics. Over the past year, Channel One has become the target of an unlikely coalition of religious conservatives and liberal activists determined to oust the program from public schools. Led by consumer activist Ralph Nader and conservative Phyllis Schlafly, the coalition has denounced both the broadcast's news content and its use of commercials in a school setting. Some, like Nader, say the network is a Trojan horse for corporate efforts to manipulate young, vulnerable children. "Channel One is simply a vehicle for commercial advertisers to bypass parents and to promote products to school children," he says. Others have complained about ads touting movies and TV shows with explicit sexual content to kids, such as *Dawson's Creek*, and stories that focus excessively on puff profiles of celebrities, rather than on hard

news. Steven Schwalm, former senior analyst at the Family Research Council, described Channel One as "clearly anti-family," citing stories that he claimed looked favorably on gay and abortion rights and the playing of background music by shock-rocker Marilyn Manson.

Channel One executives vigorously defend their programming, and have mounted an intense lobbying effort to improve their image. Last year, the company paid a prominent Washington lobbying firm, Preston Gates, \$820,000 to represent it in Washington, and recently contracted former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed to court conservative activists and educators.

"Every news program is sponsored," says Andrew Hill, president of programming for Channel One. "The fact that we take advertising makes us just like everybody else." Hill, who joined Channel One in 1997 after five years at CBS Entertainment, where he produced popular family-friendly programs like *Touched by an Angel*, insists his goal is to



Channel One's news staff in action: exploring teen pregnancy, interviewing a survivor of a Texas church shooting, reporting from China

produce quality journalism that gives young people the means to understand current events. "This is an old-fashioned straight news broadcast that reflects traditional values you don't see on the evening news anymore," he says.

Unlike its main competitor, the commercial-free "Cable in the Classroom," which is sponsored by the cable industry, Channel One offers educators a sweet deal: it provides each school with \$25,000 worth of free TVs, VCRs, and a satellite dish. Many school administrators and teachers, especially in poorer, budget-strapped districts, welcome the equipment and see the program as a cost-free way to teach kids current events.

According to the network, the show is broadcast in the forty-eight contiguous states (it is banned in New York public schools), with its greatest numbers of viewers in the South. In Texas, 1,250 schools air the broadcast daily, the largest number in any state. In the Baltimore public schools almost all middle- and high-school age children see Channel One every day. The network claims a 99 percent renewal rate among users.

Still, Channel One has been under fire since the flamboyant media entrepreneur Chris Whittle launched it in 1990. (It was sold to Primedia in 1994.) The attacks have had an effect. At a hearing last May, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee examined the company's programming. In June, the 15.9-million member Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution urging its members to resist the "advertising assault of the [Channel One] network." And in September, California passed a law that prohibits public schools from signing a contract with Channel One unless the schools first hold public hearings and find that the program is an "integral component of the student's education."

Most of Channel One's critics concentrate their fire on the ads. But what

about the journalism? Even Channel One executives admit that the broadcast has not always been a paragon of journalistic excellence. Especially in the early 1990s, the program was dominated by thumping rock music, interviews with pop-culture celebrities, and not-so-subtle tie-ins with advertisers' products. One piece closely examined the clothes, shoes, and other gear stuffed into a typical teenager's closet — almost all of which were the products of Channel One advertisers.

Lately, the broadcast has been undergoing something of a face-lift. The hiring of Hill and James Morris, a veteran of USA Today Television and ABC News,

'In one sense, Channel One has ushered in a journalistic revolution'

as co-executive producers has brought the newscast some much needed professionalism and news savvy. The show still features a mix of MTV-style graphics and rock music, and the youthful dressed-down anchors still engage in their fair share of "happy news" patter, but it is less celebrity-obsessed. A typical broadcast now includes a breaking news item, one or more features (often on a domestic social issue of interest to teens), profiles, or interviews, and a daily "Pop Quiz" on one of the day's stories.

The program is taped every evening at Channel One's studio in Los Angeles, and sent to subscribers via satellite at 3 A.M., when schools downlink the feed for that day's broadcast. The hundred or so staffers include eight full-time reporters and twelve full-time producers. For breaking news, producers rely on the AP and Knight Ridder. On big breaking stories, such as the

earthquake in Turkey, Channel One relies on ABC News, until it gets its own crew and reporter on the scene. On occasion ABC News shows use Channel One material or interview Channel One's on-the-scene reporters, as it did last year for the funeral of King Hussein.

While ABC News personalities Peter Jennings, Sam Donaldson, and Cokie Roberts have all anchored Channel One news shows, most of Channel One's staff are not experienced journalists, and a number of the reporters are still in college. Which is fine with James Morris. "We're looking for ways to connect the news to teen lives and concerns," he says, "and having reporters who are roughly our audience's age and who share their experience, gives us credibility."

Channel One reporters certainly have the attention of the students in Kathleen Ryan's first period homeroom class at Clifton High. "There's that hot girl, Tracy, she's my favorite," exclaims one male student to a chorus of approving aahs and oohs, as one of the show's attractive young female reporters puts in an appearance. "I like the way Channel One tries to relate to kids," says Mike Rabasca, a sixteen-year-old sophomore. "It makes it kind of painless to watch the news." Other students note that when they do read newspapers or watch other news broadcasts, the news is relentlessly negative and sensationalistic. "Channel One focuses on more upbeat, positive things," says Kyle Sinatra, sixteen, noting that, unlike other media, Channel One didn't dwell for days on the Columbine school shootings.

It's also clear that Channel One advertisers get their money's worth. (Advertisers pay network rates of up to \$185,000 per thirty-second slot for the privilege of reaching kids "who cannot go to the bathroom, who cannot change the station," as a former president of Channel One once boasted.) The students at Clifton High give the commercials full attention, offering their own commentary on their favorites.



Covering the earthquake in Turkey

"I absorb the commercials and let them wash over me," says Erica, a student. "I pay more attention to the ones I really like."

A review of fifteen recent Channel One broadcasts indicates that the broadcast's content has become somewhat more conventional. The newscast still devotes considerable attention to social issues of interest to its audience, such as AIDS, teen violence, drugs, and the environment, and these are often compelling pieces. At the same time, it often frames such issues as questions of individual moral choice. A recent piece on the high rate of HIV infection in teens, for example, ended with the anchor's direct appeal to teens to refrain from any kind of sexual activity.

Channel One's most impressive effort is in its coverage of foreign affairs. A recent three-part series on China featured Chinese teens working as MTV video jockeys and crowding Internet cafés, as a way of illustrating the new freedoms available to Chinese youth, while still managing to work in archival footage of Mao Ze Dong and President Nixon's trip to China for context. Each piece ran three-and-a-half to four minutes, an unheard of amount of time on network news broadcasts. The show has also given a youth spin to coverage of global conflicts where teens are often the victims, as in Rwanda and Kosovo.

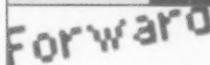
By comparison, Channel One's coverage of breaking news seems weak, often falling back on formulaic voice-over file footage and sound bites from omniscient experts. Indeed, rather than reflecting any particular ideological tilt, Channel One faithfully replicates the form, structure, and worldview of the evening newscasts on the major networks.

The real question is, Does the program help students learn more about current events and become more interested in the news? The best evidence

indicates that Channel One can be useful to students when teachers take the time to formally integrate the program into their curriculum and set aside time to discuss the broadcast, including the ads, in tandem with more in-depth supplemental material. Two years ago, Channel One hired its first educational director, Paul Folkemer, who has tried to beef up the broadcast's teachers guide and companion Web site. But most schools use the program the way Clifton High School does, where it is up to individual teachers to discuss it or not.

Last fall, both *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* joined other media companies, including Time Inc. and Scholastic, in publishing classroom newsmagazines (though only Scholastic and *The New York Times* currently take outside ads). So in one sense, certainly, Channel One has ushered in a journalistic revolution — a wave of marketing branded products (including news) to kids that no news organization would have even considered a decade ago. ■

Steven Manning is a journalist and project fellow at the Open Society Institute in New York, where he is studying the impact of commercialism on public education.

Your leading background source...

<http://www.statefarm.com>

...is the nation's leading insurer of homes.



Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.®

State Farm Insurance Companies • Home Offices: Bloomington, Illinois • [statefarm.com](http://www.statefarm.com)

Next time a story assignment involves:

- fire • burglary • arson • tornadoes • earthquake
- flood • hail • frozen pipes • wildfire • lightning
- or, almost any other peril

it likely involves homeowners insurance.

Call State Farm for the fresh angle.

Visit [statefarm.com](http://www.statefarm.com)
and click on "Media"
or, call State Farm

Media Relations:
(309) 766 2086

Why Are There So Many Doors in the Movies?



BY MITCHELL STEPHENS

Mitchell Stephens, a professor of journalism and mass communication at New York University, is the author of *A History of News* and *The Rise of the Image: The Fall of the Word*.

In an effort to gain perspective on the future of the Internet, I recently sat down and watched, notebook in hand, the 1946 version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. This film, like so many old movies and television shows, is filled with shots of characters going through doors. I counted. There are 118 such shots.

Contemplating all those opening and closing doors a half-century later, we smirk. What are they doing there? I suspect that if the film's director, Tay Garnett, had been asked, he would have alluded to the need to guide audiences in and out of scenes. John Garfield can't just magically appear, all hot and bothered, in Lana Turner's kitchen. We need, the director might have explained, to see how he got there.

But, in fact, we don't need that. As has become clear in recent decades, audiences are quite capable of following sequences in which a character is in one room in one shot and in another room (or even another country) in the next. The door (or airplane), you might say, is assumed. When Bob Rafelson remade *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in 1981, Jack Nicholson, Jessica Lange, and company pursued each other through only (*only?*) seventy-seven doors. Were the film remade again today, the door count would undoubtedly decline further.

To explain all those doors, it is necessary to look to the direct ancestor of film and most television, to their model: theater. Characters on stage can't arrive in or depart from a scene without making an entrance or exit, without, in

other words, passing through a door. That was the way it was done. It became, naturally enough, what filmmakers did. New forms of communication invariably imitate the forms that came before. As we try to figure out how to make use of such marvelous but unfamiliar new methods of informing and entertaining ourselves, we do the obvious thing: we borrow from their more familiar, if somewhat less marvelous, predecessors.

Some of these borrowings make sense. Perhaps the best historical example is the codex, which had been introduced in the Roman Empire as a replacement for unwieldy scrolls. The codex divided writings into pages, bound together. When the first printing presses were assembled in Europe in the fifteenth century, those who operated them borrowed the codex form from the handwritten manuscripts they were using as their model. It worked just fine. Our printed books and magazines still appear in what is, in essence, the form of the handwritten codex.

Many such borrowings, however, work less well. Ligatures may be the classic example. Scribes saved energy by connecting some of the letters in the words they copied; early printers wasted energy molding extra type in an effort to reproduce these ligatures. Why? It is easy once again to smirk, but that was simply the way it was done. Gutenberg and his contemporaries would be long gone before those lovely but vestigial remnants of the days of scribes began to disappear from print.

The history of communication is full of examples of similarly

wrongheaded imitations. For the first couple of decades of this century, for example, the fledgling radio industry was doing its best to produce "wireless telegraphy" or "wireless telephony" — an ether-borne version, in other words, of one-to-one communication. Of course, radio's great strength turned out to be mass communication: *broadcasting*.

Now it is the Internet that is new. One method of trying to understand which way it might be heading is to examine its borrowings — and they are many. Then we might begin the rather more difficult task of trying to figure out which of these imports might prove as useful as the codex, which as extraneous as printed ligatures.

Computers initially were passed off as big-brained adding machines or typewriters. Then they were decked out as if they were desktops. (A "metaphor," this particular imitation was labeled.) While we were still trying to get comfortable with that little scissors symbol, the Internet sprang to life on our screens — in the form of an electronic postal system. Normally societies precede their communications systems, but this imitation postal system, in a dazzling reversal, then gave birth to a whole imitation community, filled with "sites" — the Web.

Whew! It would be useful to have another decade or so to figure out whether this current conception of the Internet as a kind of easily traversed, endlessly interconnected town, with addresses and shops, is the best with which we can come up. (Couldn't we at least lose those annoying "dots"

and the "www's? But, of course, billions of dollars have already been spent constructing businesses to occupy these "sites." (Never has so much been invested so quickly in the success of a metaphor.)

The business model through which most of these investors hope to enrich themselves — selling audiences to advertisers — is, predictably, a straight borrowing from other media, particularly television. TV had stolen it from radio. Radio had stumbled upon this method of pocketing soap and cigarette money late and almost by accident; the telegraph and telephone, after all, hadn't carried ads.

Advertising seems — naturally enough, this being the way things are currently done — a reasonable way for a Web site to make money. (Especially inasmuch as the other immediately available model — charging admission to the "site" — apparently has worked only for dirty pictures and *The Wall Street Journal*.) However, if investors weren't so busy bidding up the price of each other's holdings, they might be worrying a bit more about the audiences they will be able to offer advertisers. Yes, those audiences can be carefully targeted, but there's also a good chance that, in the endlessly fragmented (more telephone or telegraph-like?) world of the Web, those audiences will be piddling. I suspect the cute, animated advertising "banners" we're all so adept at ignoring may start to look a little like ligatures.

And then there's the question of what form of information is actually being provided by the Internet. When you click on any of our news-oriented Web sites — from cnn.com to drudgereport.com to salon.com — what you are greeted by is, in essence, a table of contents. This is another interesting borrowing — from print. It may even qualify as a borrowing that makes sense. Web sites, in journalism at least, have now in fact become elaborate, cross-referenced, multi-level, searchable tables of contents, with all the articles attached. This is quite useful, whether you want to know more about East Timor, Al Gore, or Beck's tour. Maybe the table of contents will someday be seen as having done for the Web what the codex did for print.

Or maybe not. Almost all the articles that are now being so effectively indexed and linked online have "headlines" and are organized into "pages." And with the

exception of occasional videos (which remain, for the moment, low-resolution and small-screen), they all could, and in many cases did, appear in a newspaper or magazine. The Web may be structured like a community; it may hope to finance itself like television; but its content — its news content — is currently just about pure print. Imitation of this intensity, history tells us, is a sign that a form of communication has not yet found its way.

A new medium usually has to overcome a strong tendency to devote itself almost entirely to the products of the much more respected older medium it is imitating. Only then can it come up with

original products of its own. Writing had to do more than preserve the ancient epics. Printing had to do more than make the old handwritten manuscripts accessible. Film and television had (have) to do more than aim cameras at plays.

Is what we are seeing in this, the infancy of the Internet, mere "digital newspaper" or "digital magazinery"? Will a *Columbia Journalism Review* writer someday sit down and count all the "pages" in a typical Web "site" back at the turn of the millennium that were turned over to listings of unimaginatively print-like articles? Will that person's readers smirk? ■

CITI

JOURNALISTIC EXCELLENCE

AWARD

The Citi Journalistic Excellence Award is a mark of distinction and professionalism for business journalists around the world. Now in its 19th year, the program has recognized over 200 journalists from more than 110 media in 32 countries.

Selected by independent juries, journalists participate in a 12-day educational seminar in New York and Washington, D.C., led by the Department of Continuing Education and Special Programs at Columbia University and sponsored by Citigroup.

Created in 1982 for journalists from Latin America, the program has since expanded to Asia, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe.

Citigroup (NYSE: C), the most global financial services company, provides some 100 million consumers, corporations, governments and institutions in 100 countries with a broad range of financial products and services, including consumer banking and credit, corporate and investment banking, insurance, securities brokerage and asset management. The 1998 merger of Citicorp and Travelers Group brought together such brand names as Citibank, Travelers, Salomon Smith Barney, Commercial Credit (now named CitiFinancial), and Primerica under Citigroup's trademark red umbrella. Additional information may be found at: www.citigroup.com.

Newspapers Are Languishing As the Net Speeds Up



BY **GENEVA OVERHOLSER**

Geneva Overholser (genevaoh@aol.com), a syndicated columnist for The Washington Post Writers Group, writes regularly for *CJR* about newspapers. Among positions she has held are editorial writer for *The New York Times*, editor of *The Des Moines Register*, ombudsman for *The Washington Post*. She also served nine years on the Pulitzer Prize board.

At a recent meeting at a journalism school, a group of educators and media types talked about whether to extend the institution's reach to online content providers. We wouldn't want to rush into it, said some. It's not even clear these people are journalists, or which ones

are journalists, said others. An image began to take shape in my mind. Here is our group, sitting around debating, when suddenly the camera pulls back, revealing us all in a little box — held aloft by a giant with a bemused look on his face: the Net.

Versions of this what-shall-we-do-about-the-Net conversation are common in the newspaper world these days. "It's not real journalism," someone will say. "Maybe not, but they're about to eat our lunch," a colleague will reply. "Nobody really reads online; people don't go to the Net for news," one journalist will contend. "But shouldn't we be doing our best to transfer our ethics onto the Web?" another will ask. It occurs to me that, by the time we figure out how much we'll deign to have to do with the online world — and how many of its "content providers" we're willing to call journalists — they're going to own us all.

At a different meeting, at Stanford last May, Katrina Heron, a former newspaperwoman who is now editor in chief of *Wired* magazine, made some remarks to another group of journalists. Her tone boiled down very clearly to this sentiment: It's so sad what has happened to newspapers, and how they've allowed themselves to become irrelevant.

I'm not sure exactly what we've allowed, and what's happened to us without our permission, but we are certainly downcast these days. Too often, we act as if we have little hope of solving our difficulties. And our company executives themselves behave as if they have little faith in our future over the long haul. In many a newsroom, we're more worried about what we're losing than about the opportunities we're missing. In many a front office, they're more worried about squeezing a buck out of the current operation than about investing one in its future. There are exceptions, particularly among the biggest newspapers, which are forming partnerships with network

'WE NOW HAVE A WAY FOR READERS TO REACH JOURNALISTS BUT THE JOURNALISTS DON'T WANT TO BE REACHED.'

and cable television and online sites as if they really believe that the information they have is their prize and their promise. But why aren't more newspapers across the nation similarly enthusiastic about their potential in this brave new world in which content is king?

In any given community, we are the biggest newsgathering operation in town. Nobody can do it the way we do. Newspapers have the editing skills that the new world demands — the ability to help people make sense out of the exploding mass of information. And, for all our credibility problems, we

have an imprimatur that people can rely on as they seek to determine what, out of so much that's available, to believe.

If newspaper company executives could just cast their eyes one hill behind the near horizon, mightn't we all behave differently? Wouldn't we be scrapping to find ways to dish up our information to every reader we can reach, through whatever means available, rather than zeroing in on only those readers our hard-copy advertisers want? Wouldn't we use less of the company's energy to concentrate on delivering shampoo in our newspapers' wrappers, and more to delivering local-local news on the Web sites that are increasingly taking over that function in big cities? Wouldn't we be building and training our staffs — the folks who spin the gold — and paying the kinds of beginning salaries that attract the best and brightest among young people, instead of lagging behind even teachers' wages? If executives imparted a belief in our future *as news and editorial operations*, wouldn't newspaper people be more eager to see their hard-gathered work dispersed as widely as possible — rather than grumbling about having to do a story for the afternoon online edition?

Even among papers that are moving quickly and effectively online, reluctance to change is visible, as *The Washington Post's* ombudsman, E. R. Shipp, made clear in a recent column: "As the *Post* promotes its presence on the World Wide Web (washingtonpost.com), an increasing number of readers obtain their news online. And many of them want to reach reporters and columnists —

sometimes to praise, sometimes to damn, sometimes to seek additional information — via e-mail. Fewer than 200 editors, reporters, photographers, and other newsroom staffers make their e-mail addresses available via *washingtonpost.com*.

A reader asked, wrote Shipp, "What are some of your reporters afraid of that they do not publish their e-mail addresses on your Web site? That their ideas will not withstand logical scrutiny? That they are anointed and their publishing articles is a one-way communication street to us paupers?"

The ombudsman answered: "[Executive editor Len] Downie, who was unaware that this was an issue for readers, has said he will discuss with his editors whether there is any good reason to withhold e-mail addresses."

We finally have a way for readers to reach journalists conveniently and quickly — but the journalists don't want to be reached, and it doesn't occur to editors that this might be an issue?

Still, the *Post* is investing a lot in new methods of delivering its most important product, news. Too many other newspaper companies are, by contrast, trying to scrimp and save their way forward. They underserve readers with a meager newshole for foreign and national and local news, let their staffs and their wire service offerings atrophy, and put their newshole into advertorial, real estate, and automotive sections and their energies into keeping advertisers happy enough to maintain profits at the unrealistically high levels shareholders have come to expect. In an era that cries out for entrepreneurialism and a belief in the future, newspapering is risk-averse and dispirited, cowed by the over-emphasis on short-term profits, and steadily bleeding the commitment to public service that animates us.

At the Stanford meeting where Heron spoke, I overheard a newspaper company executive talking with a former editor and publisher. The two agreed that they both "fear for the future of newspapers." The first executive said, "As long as they're meeting these profit expectations, it can't work. Eventually, it'll happen — we'll give up on these expectations and find solutions. But we will have to grow more afraid first."

Here's hoping the Net is cause enough for fear, and cause enough for hope — and soon. ■

CLASSIFIED

FELLOWSHIPS

CRITICS WANTED. The National Critics Institute is designed for journalists and teachers who want to write more knowledgeably about the theatre. It's held every July in conjunction with the National Playwright's Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Waterford, CT. NCI critic-fellows interact with talented theater artists, follow the progress of a dozen new scripts, and produce daily copy under the supervision of seasoned professional critics. Some financial aid is available. Send SASE to NCI, O'Neill Center, 234 W. 44th Street, New York, NY 10036, or call 212/382-2790.

PUBLIC HEALTH JOURNALISM FELLOWSHIP AT CDC. The CDC Foundation is pleased to announce that a new public health journalism fellowship program funded by the Knight Foundation is now accepting applications at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. Six mid-career science and medical journalists will work side-by-side with scientists and researchers at the CDC as Knight Journalism Fellows. The fellowship program spans four months, beginning in July 2000, and includes training with CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) officers. The fellows will explore epidemiology and biostatistics; study in-depth a public health issue of their choice; and experience public health in the field. Application deadline is April 1, 2000. For more information and an application, visit the Knight Journalism Fellowships at CDC Web site at <http://www.cdcfoundation.org/kjf>.

JOURNALISM PROGRAMS

"FOLLOW THE MONEY," Deep Throat told Woodward and Bernstein. "It's the Economy, Stupid!" James Carville advised. Take their advice—and study business journalism in NYC. Master the fundamentals. Develop a beat. Study full-time or part-time with expert journalists at Baruch College of CUNY. Fellowships available. Admission Spring or Fall. For information, contact the Master's Program in Business Journalism. 212-802-6640 or Joshua_Mills@baruch.cuny.edu

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

THE JOURNALISM DEPARTMENT AT THE COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION is seeking qualified applicants for two full-time Assistant or Associate Professor positions in the Broadcast Journalism Sequence. Candidates for both positions must have excellent professional and/or academic credentials to teach basic and advanced courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Advanced degree and teaching experience preferred. Rank and salary will depend on professional and teaching achievements. **RADIO/TV NEWS REPORTING AND PRODUCTION:** Courses include Radio News, Advanced Radio Production, and TV News Reporting and Producing. Strong skills in digital newsgathering would be an asset. **TV NEWS REPORTING AND NEWSCAST PRODUCTION:** Courses include Broadcast News Writing and Reporting, TV Newscast Production. Experience in linear and non-linear production, investigative/in-depth reporting, and computer assisted reporting would be an asset. Send cover letter, résumé and three letters of reference to: Jennifer Morcone, Manager of Faculty Services, Boston University, College of Communication, 640 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215. E-mail: jmorcone@bu.edu; Web site: www.bu.edu/com; Tel: 617/353-8023; Fax: 617/353-3405. The selection process will continue until a successful candidate is hired. Position to start in September, 2000. An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution.

DONALD W. REYNOLDS CHAIR IN BUSINESS JOURNALISM: Washington and Lee University's Department of Journalism and Mass Communications seeks a senior journalist of national reputation to hold and create a program in business journalism, utilizing the resources of the department and the university's Williams School of Commerce, Economics and Politics. By their education and experience, candidates should be prepared to create undergraduate courses in business and economics reporting and in mass media management, beginning in the Fall. Candidates should have extensive reporting experience and a graduate degree, preferably an earned doctorate. Knowledge of and experience in media management are preferred. Teaching experience and a background in new technologies are very desirable. The university is a highly competitive liberal arts college in the Valley of Virginia. The accredited department has seven full-time faculty and 80 majors. Applications should include the candidate's discussion of the program he or she envisions, a vita, examples of reporting and other accomplishments, and names of at least three references. Send by April 1 to Hampden H. Smith III, Reid Hall, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Va. 24450. (540-463-8434; SmithH@WLU.edu)

How About Psychological Testing for the Media?



BY GENE COLLIER

Gene Collier is a features columnist at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

In the practiced, reflexive, establishment media, we do what we do because that's what we do. It is the era of Jurassic Park journalism, I like to lecture, in which we are all so taken with what we can create and how fast and how slick we engineer it, that the issue of whether or not we should do it gets kicked under the bed for the amusement of niggling dust-bunny academics.

Well, guess what — it's time to crawl under there again, if for nothing better than to see how careless we are.

What are we doing, for example, flushing a Neanderthal out of the Major League Players Association, and playing his paranoia as legitimate social commentary?

Nowhere in the bonfire of the inanities that roared around the John Rocker situation was there a protracted media soul-sweep on the question of whether *Sports Illustrated* might have taken a hard look at the bigoted ravings of a rockhead relief pitcher and decided they were just too stupid to inject into the national discourse. National discourse benefited not by as much as one hypothetical molecule from Rocker's contribution, and the magazine knew it wouldn't. *S.I.* could deliver his hurtful twaddle, therefore it would. *Should* got kicked under the bed.

In other words, journalists have a responsibility to consider who is speaking. When I need some measured outlook on AIDS awareness, Asian women, African-Americans, or immigration policy, I generally don't go to the Atlanta Braves bullpen. Even if I couldn't get out of the way of Rocker's harangue, I'd still ignore it.

The upshot of Rocker's disseminated idiocy was that Major League Baseball ordered psychological testing for him. Will anyone order psychological testing for the media?

Only a borderline psychotic would look over the tape of a Florida TV station's interview with Pensacola dishwasher Mickey Hill, the mother of Oklahoma City bomber Tim McVeigh, and decide that it should be allowed to escape from an editing suite.

"Yeah, it was a big event, but so was the O.J. Simpson trial," Hill began in a little blitz of imbecilic remarks that appeared in *USA Today* in December. "Every bombing or shooting is a big case. Plane crashes — there's more people killed in a plane crash than was in Oklahoma City. I mean I do feel sorry for them . . . but . . . let's get it out of our mind."

Again, the mindless implanted in our minds, and in this case, telling us what to clear out of there — one hundred and sixty-eight dead at the hands of her son, many of them children, and hundreds more hurt, just because Tim's opinion of the government wasn't real favorable.

Is this what we're supposed to be doing? Laying out Mickey Hill's perspective so that it can be felt in Oklahoma City?

The media, Mickey Hill said, "grabbed [the story] and right away made a big deal out of it, they ruined our whole family's reputation, ruined our lives."

I'm sure we'd plead guilty to making "a big deal" out of the worst act of terrorism ever on U.S. soil. While there won't be much handwringing over whether we should have thrown Oklahoma City into national briefs and filled with an-

other NASCAR profile, we instantly recognize Hill's comments as so devoid of reason they border on the pathetic. And yet we frame those comments for mass distribution as though they were in themselves a worthy news story. Unfortunately, stories like this never run under a headline like **FLORIDA WOMAN JUST UNBELIEVABLY STUPID**.

One would hope the legitimate media's insistence on trying to harvest knowledge from barren fields is not a response to the proliferation of "infotainment" venues throughout the culture. Even a subtle deterioration in standards doesn't mean we have to disassemble the profession into the set of *Politically Incorrect* with Bill Maher. Maher, the ABC late-night celebrity maven, is funny and informed, but as the basis for *Politically Incorrect*, he assembles a four-person panel of the largely uninformed, or at least monstrously inexpert.

I'll admit to being intrigued by this format for a couple of weeks, but very quickly I got to wondering why I was listening to a loud treatment of, for example, the gays-in-the-military issue by the likes of Pauly Shore, Mary J. Blige, and one of those actresses with three names.

Life is too short for that, and that's what our audience has to think when we give them John Rocker on diversity, when we give them Mickey Hill on grief management.

I've run into some honorable backlash for this view from highly esteemed colleagues who scold me that we need to scour all corners for opinion, that it fulfills our mission toward some ultimate truth. But while such scouring is certainly a noble pursuit, that does not, can not, obligate us to spread the inane. ■

True Radio Confessions: Time to Move That Dial?



BY MIKE HOYT

Mike Hoyt
(mh151@columbia.edu)
is CJR's senior editor.

Stock your mind, stock your mind. It is your house of treasure and no one in the world can interfere with it. If you won the Irish Sweepstakes and bought a house that needed furniture would you fill it with bits and pieces of rubbish? Your mind is your house and if you fill it with rubbish from the cinemas it will rot in your head.

Headmaster O'Halloran, Leamys School, in *Angela's Ashes*.

Bless me, father, for I have sinned, maybe. I've been listening to *Imus*.

The radio show?

Yes, father. I wake up to NPR. I pack the kids' lunches and learn about politics. I do sit-ups and learn about South American jungles. I warm up the car and learn about the expectations of the auto industry and the behavior of black holes. I stock my mind. But man does not live by NPR alone, padre. Man needs a laugh. When *Morning Edition* starts to repeat, I slip over to *Imus in the Morning*.

You and five million other souls. What's the problem?

Well, after NPR I feel like I worked out and ate grapefruit, spiritually speaking. After *Imus* I feel like I had a cheeseburger and a cigarette.

A guilty pleasure, huh? What's the attraction?

I like news and politics, father, and Don Imus is a news and politics junkie. He talks to Al Gore and John McCain, Bob Kerrey and Orrin Hatch. You get these insights, because it's kind of loose and unpredictable.

He talks to journalists, too. Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather, Frank Rich and Gail Collins, Andrea Mitchell and Tim Russert. Howard Kurtz and Anna Quindlen and Jeff

Greenfield and David Remnick and Brian Lamb. They're all selling their shows and columns and books. But sometimes — Bob Schieffer comes to mind — they give you something to chew on.

Cut to the chase, my son. My back hurts. Where's the sin?

Well, the show goes low. Not Howard Stern low, but ...

Example?

OK, lemme see. He has Jeffrey Toobin on, who is hawking this book about the impeachment trials. And it refers to the Paula Corbin Jones case. And, embarrassingly, to Jones's observations about — sorry, father — the president's penis.

Toobin writes about this?

Only on pages 43, 44, 47, 124-25, 130, 137-39, 159, and 161. Bear with me. Jones apparently claims that the president seemed under-endowed. So Imus thinks he has this world penile scoop, and the show goes on and on about it — song parodies, skits, references — for the entire month of January. We get Joe Klein, followed by dick jokes. Cokie Roberts; dick jokes. Jonathan Alter; more dick jokes.

And sometimes, padre, there is no separation. Imus tells Ron Insana of CNBC, who would interview the president that night about the economy, to inquire about his shlong.

I see. So the journalists are put on that level.

Exactly.

And the show can be mean-spirited...

Sort of high-school mean. Ted Koppel's ears. Tipper Gore's weight. Who do we like today and who do we hate. Mostly hate. And there's the race factor.

Oh?

Imus's sidekick, Bernard McGuirk,

salts the show with ethnic accents. And he does these Amos 'n' Andy sort of voices that sound like black prostitutes, dumb black athletes, and so forth. Sometimes Imus pretends to pull McGuirk back. He'd argue that everybody is an equal-opportunity target, but I think the bad-boy glee goes up a notch for blacks.

Go on.

Murray Kempton wrote about this, back during the O.J. trial. Kempton wondered why a more-than-suspect black guy got so much attention on *Imus* while a more-than-suspect white guy did not. A fifty-to-zero disparity, he wrote, was "not indubitable proof of racism but it can quite try the patience."

Good old Murray. An Anglican, I understand. What else?

Weasel words, father. Imus spends three days hammering Lesley Stahl of *60 Minutes*, including a sketch that tells her to "go get another face-lift." Next day she's on the show, chuckling and mentioning her book. He spends weeks talking about how he can't stand Al Gore, the "phoniest person on the planet." It builds to a crescendo until — surprise! — Al Gore comes on the show. And now, Hillary, Imus loathes her, calls her an "evil presence." Then we read in *USA Today* that Hillary has been invited to the show.

It's like the words have no weight, padre. Like news and politics is one big joke. And I sit in the Taurus grinning. Complicit. Isn't that some kind of a sin?

Who knows? But here's what to do: move up the dial! Try the college stations. Books on tape. Stock your mind, my son.

What if I need a laugh?

Watch *The Sopranos*. ■

Reflections on Broadcast Award: Amidst the Chaff, Some Good Stuff



BY LAWRENCE K. GROSSMAN

Lawrence K. Grossman, a former president of NBC News and PBS, is a regular columnist for CJR.

Imagine getting to see and hear in one concentrated dose just about all of the year's best national and local television and radio reporting. It's a news junkie's heaven, an insomniac's boon, and the only pay-off for eyestrain and brain drain from

untold hours

of screening by the duPont-Columbia journalism awards judges. Amidst all the chaff that's broadcast all year long, it's gratifying to find so much good stuff produced by so many stations, networks, and independent reporters. Herewith, a few personal observations about this year's crop of duPont-Columbia winners and also-rans:

When it comes to radio journalism, public radio alone saved radio's bacon. Last season, public radio literally had the field to itself. Commercial radio's entries were almost nonexistent. Now the most profitable of all media, commercial radio was such a non-player that one might suspect its profits run so high because its mega-owners spend so little money, time, and effort bothering to broadcast anything important.

By contrast, the breadth and diversity of public radio's journalistic offerings last season were truly remarkable. NPR, as usual, supplied outstanding network entries from *All Things Considered*, *Morning Edition* and *Weekend Edition*, and other series. But equally impressive was the sheer volume of first-rate submissions and award winners by local public radio stations, Public Radio International, small enterprises like Youth Radio, and a variety of independent, unaffiliated radio

producers. *This American Life*, *World*, *Marketplace*, and *The Infinite Mind* broadcast a host of excellent, provocative reports on timely issues. No wonder public radio's audience is expanding so fast. It ranks as one of the nation's most important, reliable, respected, and diversified sources of local, national, and world news reporting. And it puts commercial radio to shame.

I was dismayed that two exceptional public radio entries just

missed winning a silver baton because the competition was so tough: NPR correspondent Joanne Silberner's brilliant documentary on *The Infinite Mind* about the complex issues involved in closing down a Haverford, Pennsylvania, mental hospital and releasing all of its patients, which she took a year off from her regular job to report; and a compelling history of slavery in a small southern town, produced by WAMU in Washington, D.C.

AN UPDATE AND CLARIFICATION

My column in the last issue (January/February) focused on the path-breaking effort of diet-pill maker Metabolife to counter a potentially damaging *20/20* investigative report by taking its case directly to the people via the Internet. The column quoted Metabolife's p.r. consultant Michael Sitrik, who said he devised the preemptive Internet attack strategy "as a last resort," fearing his client was about to get unfairly clobbered by *20/20*. Sitrik went on to explain that ABC's Boston affiliate WCVB had broadcast an excerpt from an interview with a doctor who alleged that people can die from taking the best-selling Metabolife diet pills. That quote was misleading and taken out of context, Sitrik claimed, because the station had edited out the doctor's modifying words, "If you abuse the product."

Now a federal judge has undercut Sitrik's claim. Metabolife had sued WCVB, its reporter Susan Wornick, and the doctor, George Blackburn, in federal court for "defamation, slander, trade libel, and intentional and negligent interference with prospec-

tive economic advantage." Its law firm also sent threatening letters to a host of other media companies it thought might run the unflattering story. The court required WCVB to place the unedited transcript of Dr. Blackburn's interview in the record. Here is the relevant excerpt of what the doctor actually said: ". . . people can die from this . . . there are people who are taking similar types of these products who are getting heart attacks, and of course the abuse can lead to death. But I mean, you can die from taking this product."

The federal judge found the statements WCVB broadcast "substantially true" and dismissed Metabolife's lawsuit on First Amendment grounds. He excoriated the company for seeking to intimidate the press and squelch public discussion. Finessing the press by turning to the Internet to state your case is fair game. But threatening the press and trying to chill public discussion of an important health issue, the judge made clear, are beyond the pale. Metabolife is appealing the verdict. It should lose.

On the television front, it was a pleasure to single out CNN Washington correspondent Candy Crowley from the thundering herd of inside-the-Beltway reporters, for her terrific coverage of the impeachment and trial of President Clinton. Formerly an NBC News correspondent who never got enough air time, Crowley was impressive covering this monster story for CNN. Her many pieces were superbly written, thoughtful, insightful, and fair.

The volume and quality of the investigative reports by the nation's small- and medium-market TV stations last season came as a major surprise, at least to this judge. By contrast, the work of the major-market TV stations was disappointing. That may be an aberration rather than a trend, but I'm not optimistic. One encouraging augury: for the first time, the year's major-market duPont award went not to a TV station but to a local cable news operation, New England Cable News, a relatively new competitor on the local television scene.

One major-market public TV station, KQED in San Francisco, submitted a poignant and ambitious local investi-

gative documentary special that examined the influence of race and ethnicity and the difficulties of the poor in gaining admission to Berkeley and other colleges. KQED's *Making the Grade* didn't win a silver baton, but what makes it worth mentioning is its rarity. Public TV stations hardly ever take on any major local journalistic efforts. It's about time they did.

The intense competition between *60 Minutes* and *20/20* for journalistic enterprise and strong investigative reporting came as no surprise to any of the judges. While these network newsmagazines continue to do good work, the drought persists among all networks in the production of timely news documentaries on controversial issues. Such prime-time specials used to be the pride of the news divisions. Today they are an endangered, if not extinct species. The best national submissions in this category came from the independent producers and journalists who turned up on PBS, notwithstanding the daunting challenges they all face raising money for their work. You've got to admire their grit and determination.

One signature characteristic of the best independent journalists is the extraordinary originality of the subjects they choose, especially true for this year's winners. Filmmaker Walter Brock's silver baton winner *If I Can't Do It* was a brave, unflinching autobiographical portrait of a man with a severe case of cerebral palsy, an "in your face" story about a fierce advocate for the rights of the disabled. *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords* was a fascinating archival history of a corner of our culture that Americans, both black and white, know almost nothing about. And the gold baton winner, *Facing the Truth*, Bill Moyers's extraordinarily powerful two-hour documentary, offered a searing insight into the workings and impact of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Finally, with so much criticism leveled at television for its diminishing coverage of world news since the end of the cold war, it was good to see the emphasis on international reporting by this year's duPont winners, with silver and gold batons going to superb pieces on South Africa, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Russia. ■

ombudsman

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 51

reporters and a photographer, not an ombudsman," said Art Nauman, executive secretary of the Organization of News Ombudsmen and former ombudsman for *The Sacramento Bee*. "Still, we think the importance of these jobs is becoming more apparent to a variety of news professionals today."

Nauman conceded that as more organizations add these positions — papers in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Miami, and Akron all designated their ombudsmen or reader representatives in the last year — an old lesson is repeating itself: When you appoint someone to represent the public interest at a newspaper, tensions are inevitably going to rise in the newsroom.

At times, ombudsmen find themselves directly at odds with the policies of higher-ups at their newspapers, and the results can range from cordial disagreements to tense encounters. Last December 10, *Los Angeles Times* associate editor and readers' representative Narda Zacchino devoted a column to the Staples controversy, and bluntly described what happened as a mistake

that "has the potential for corruption and undermines readers' trust." She also criticized the decision to devote an edition of the Sunday magazine to the Staples Center.

"I heard that people above me didn't like it [the column] very much," said Zacchino, a thirty-year veteran of the paper. "Maybe there were some expectations that it [the Staples Center column] wouldn't be so controversial, that I'd be explaining the paper's side of things," she said. "I knew Mark Willes [Times Mirror's c.e.o.] wasn't happy about it, but we had a good, healthy discussion. He made some good points to me, I made some good points to him, and we parted in a very civil way, very cordially."

There was similar friction several years ago at *The Kansas City Star*, when Miriam Popper, reader representative and associate editor, internally criticized what she said was the paper's "overblown" emphasis on the city's NFL team and its chances in post-season play. "We just agreed to disagree," she said of her conversations with higher-ups. "Sometimes there are tense and very challenging moments."

Do ombudsmen spur major change at their news organizations? Many try to do so, but the results seem mixed.

Geneva Overholser, former ombudsman at *The Washington Post*, for example, said her columns may have contributed to the *Post's* eventual decision to expand its metro coverage, but she said she had little impact on the paper's policies regarding the use of unattributed sources.

"This work they do is very important," says Bill Kovach, curator of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, who singled out Jack Thomas at *The Boston Globe* and E.R. Shipp at *The Washington Post* as good examples. "They see their mandate as not only responding to specific complaints, but helping people in the newsroom understand what's behind reader concerns."

Above all, the designation of an ombudsman tells readers that a paper is not afraid to confront its own mistakes.

"In so many ways these positions are more important than ever, because there is a greater sense of crisis and a need to change at newspapers," said Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. "There's a greater sense of disconnect with the public, and the role of an ombudsman of today is more than just protecting a paper's image in the community. It's a question of core credibility." ■

Job Seekers: Find a job.
Employers: Post your job.



JOURNALISM
JOBS.COM

www.journalismjobs.com

JournalismJobs.com is operated in association with:
Columbia Journalism Review

BOOKS

White Reporter In Black Hell

BY LES PAYNE

Viewed from afar, across the Atlantic, say, it appears at first recollection that South Africa did not issue up much by way of journalism during its hellish days of apartheid. What reputations were made, accrued, for the most part, to foreign newspapers and their correspondents, many of them Americans such as Jim Hoagland, Michael Parks, Joseph Lelyveld, and reporters from smaller newspapers who were spared the Pulitzer Prize.

Foreign correspondents accept that their foraging is often done as scavengers feeding, in part, off the plates of local reporters. Unlike the cheetah, if we are to place such reporters on the playing fields of the Serengeti, they seldom get to run down their own quarry. Usually arriving late for a breaking international story, frazzled, and with the wrong language, these skilled swashbucklers find themselves hampered abroad by the bluntness of government tyranny and lacking contacts and the subtleties of culture that back home allowed them to master the journalistic access so vital to prying out information for significant stories.

Thus the work of the foreign correspondent, no matter how determined, is invariably indebted to the digging of local reporters. These unsung yeomen, sometimes hired as fixers and translators, are seldom attributed, poorly paid, and most often underestimated. In South Africa, these local reporters, many of them blacks with easy access to Soweto and other off-limit townships, helped lay the foundation for what solid reporting came out of that republic during those tumultuous apartheid days.

In addition to foreign correspondents who made their reputations, there were local, white, mainstream South African reporters who, beginning in the late 1950s, distinguished themselves with courageous journalism that informed the world about



Police (two men at right) question Pogrund (left) about a *Rand Daily Mail* report

the government's racial barbarism. Some of these mainstream names we have come to know, men such as Donald Woods and Allister Sparks. Now we have also been offered the memoirs of one of the bravest journalists of the lot, Benjamin Pogrund.

Pogrund opens his book, *War of Words*, with a 1961 telephone call from underground fugitive Nelson Mandela, known as the "Black Pimpernel." The young reporter's newspaper, *The Rand Daily Mail*, relying on erroneous government and police estimates, had just helped squash a

record, Mandela gave Pogrund a quote for the *Mail* saying, "We are not disheartened, even though the people did not respond to the stay-at-home to the extent to which we expected them to do." However, in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela wrote that, as a result of the strike effort, "I felt let down and disappointed by the reaction."

In a later telephone call that night, the much-hunted Mandela told Pogrund that government "intransigence, backed up by the military might of its police force," had soured his organization on nonviolence. Indeed, in his own book, Mandela, referring to his telephone call to Pogrund wrote, "I suggested that the days of nonviolence were over." The next day, Pogrund published a story quoting Mandela, from underground, as saying, "I don't think, speaking for myself, that I can continue speaking peace and nonviolence in the light of the methods adopted by the government to suppress our peaceful protest."

Mandela, of course, would slip out of South Africa to drum up ANC support in Africa and Britain, and upon his return would get arrested for illegal departure as a prelude to his Rivonia treason trial. Lively charges have persisted over the years that the CIA assisted the South Africans in tracking Mandela. Pogrund offers that "there is no certainty about

**WAR OF WORDS:
MEMOIRS OF A SOUTH AFRICAN
JOURNALIST**
BY BENJAMIN POGRUND
SEVEN STORIES PRESS. 379 PP. \$26.95

Mandela-masterminded black labor strike. While African workers had not responded in the numbers Mandela sought, the first day of the three-day strike was not the bust registered in the *Mail's* headline: OFFICIALS SAY STAY-HOME UNSUCCESSFUL.

Still, Mandela held blameless the young beat reporter who covered black politics for the liberal *Mail* that was so influential among blacks that its headline put a significant damper on the strike. "Benjie-boy," Mandela said, "I know it wasn't your fault." For the

REPUBLIC OF DENIAL

Press, Politics, & Public Life

MICHAEL JANEWAY

"Janeway's unflinching analysis is the 'give it to me straight, doc' version of media criticism. The language is strong, the implications overwhelming, and the prognosis grave."

—Mark Jurkowitz, *Boston Globe*

"[Janeway] is a master of subtle distinctions—his nuances have nuances—and his skill in making fine points sets him apart from the usual exegetes of the grand public narrative."

—William Powers, *Wilson Quarterly*

\$22.50



WHAT ARE JOURNALISTS FOR?

JAY ROSEN

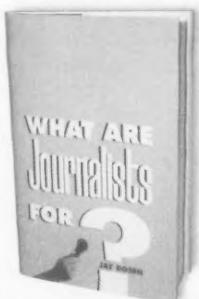
"Rosen is the intellectual force behind the civic journalism movement, and this remarkable book is the best statement yet of civic journalism's philosophy, promise, and problems. A must read."

—Thomas E. Patterson

"A valuable addition to a meager list of books that take journalism seriously."

—Tom Goldstein,

New York Times Book Review \$29.95



Yale University Press

www.yale.edu/yup



who tipped off the police as to where to find [Mandela]." Within weeks of his conversation with Pogrund, the ANC adopted its policy of armed struggle, formed Umkhonto weSizwe (Spear of the Nation), and took up arms against the apartheid government of South Africa.

Pogrund was just this close, as close as a white reporter could get, to the beginning of Mandela's long, difficult journey from armed struggle, through twenty-seven years of imprisonment, and finally, to the South African state house as president of the republic.

Wisely, Pogrund's book is not about Mandela. That body of work is being compiled by other writers. The memoir at hand is rather about the struggle of his newspaper, *The Rand Daily Mail*, and his twenty-six-year association with that liberal journal as reporter, government target, and night editor. As a young reporter, with college degrees in psychology and social work, Pogrund would, in addition to Mandela, establish as sources such other luminary black leaders as Nobel laureates Albert Luthuli and Bishop Desmond Tutu, as well as Mandela's colleague Robert Sobukwe.

The story of the *Mail*, which was closed in 1985, is an instructive account of a liberal newspaper challenging a bare-knuckled, white-minority government during a critical time in the 1960s and '70s. Though laced with details and energy, Pogrund's account, read abroad by non-indigenous readers, lacks a certain adequacy of context. Despite that, the journalist's personal experiences, recollections, and perspective are clear, sometimes moving, and not as distancing as one might expect from a foreign source.

Pogrund's rendition of the apartheid superstructure his newspaper is up against takes a measure of the triple-canopy of societal reality that characterized so much of South African life. The social contract was not simply black-white, but one dictated by a South African government controlled since 1948 by an Afrikaans Nation party that gave the majority Dutch-descendants political dominance over the minority English-speaking whites who controlled the private economy.

This white construct led to a bifurcated media that produced two sets of newspapers, one in Afrikaans, the other in English. A third group of papers, such as the *Sowetan*, all white-owned, were published in English for African readers in the townships. While the Boers' news-

papers sternly supported the apartheid government, the English papers stood not nearly so sternly in opposition. However, Pogrund's *Rand Daily Mail*, in the early days at least, stood a lone and determined journal of the opposition to the apartheid government.

Campaigning *Mail* editors such as Laurence Gander, who wrote a bold antigovernment commentary, and Raymond Louw are credited with allowing Pogrund to pursue his groundbreaking reporting. Both journalists gained international reputations in America and Europe for their own fearless stand against the South African government.

Pogrund covered the government that fathered such grand schemes as a final solution, under "Separate Development," calling for African fragmentation and tribalism, and that enforced a policy of petty strictures against interracial sex, dancing, and work equity. As a labor writer, he disclosed the ridiculous attempts by unions, even in the face of white worker shortages, to restrict positions to whites only under the outmoded "Job Reservations Act." One such decree mandated that, although blacks could apply prime coats of paint, the final application had to be done by white house-painters.

Even the *Mail*, its liberal perspective notwithstanding, had to do business within the superstructure of apartheid laws. The races had to be separated in all matters. Early on, the *Mail* hired blacks only as menial workers, not as reporters, photographers, or other professional staffers. Pogrund does not shy away from the fact that after blacks were finally hired as reporters the *Mail* discriminated against them.

"Apartheid could not be avoided even in our [newspaper] offices," Pogrund writes. "The toilets had to be segregated by law . . . , separate cafeterias were also required by law, and their existence was reinforced by the white production workers."

The most treacherous apartheid minefield Pogrund had to traverse — the one that would land him in jail for eight days and, later (1969), after an eight-month trial, find him guilty of giving false testimony — concerned the practice of a type of journalism that challenged the government's sense of itself.

Pogrund spent a career at the *Mail* trekking the veritable mountain range of laws the blunt Boers government promulgated against press behavior and that of the general citizenry. One was the Official Secrets Act, which "sought to

protect information affecting the security of the state. By 1965, the nationalists added the phrase 'police matter,' defined as 'any matter relating to the preservation of the internal security or the maintenance of law and order by the South African Police.'

Two other laws, the Native Administration Act (1927) and the Riotous Assemblies Act (1956), gave the government ominous powers to "ban any newspaper or any other 'documentary information' that was 'calculated to engender hostility' between blacks and whites." In practice, the high-minded possibility of these acts had the effect of punishing actions that might bring the races together across ethnic lines.

The towering apartheid law Pogrund ran afoul of with his best-detailed story in the book is the Prison Act. To document prison conditions, Pogrund settled on a single, white ex-inmate named Harold "Jock" Strachan. The thirty-nine-year-old former air force pilot had tangled with amateurish revolutionary activity and had served a stretch as a political prisoner. After persuading Strachan to tape some 35,000 words about prison conditions, Pogrund took them to Gander, his editor.

"If what [Strachan] says is true," Gander said, "our jails are nothing less than concentration camps."

The 12,000 word, three-part series detailed a prison system rife with brutality, terror, and senseless deprivations. Articulate and with a sharp eye for detail, the ex-political prisoner, whose account was run in the first-person, carried the following detail:

"We had a flush toilet in the cell, which is quite unusual as far as prisons I have been in. But an interesting thing about this toilet was that you didn't only defecate in it, but you also washed in it; you brushed your teeth in it."

Treatment for black prisoners was even more severe: "Non-European prisoners who had to see the doctors were brought out at about 6:15 in the morning, and it could be freezing cold in Pretoria. They stood naked: sixty, seventy, eighty of them at a time. Huddled up like birds trying to keep warm. Like poultry. Stark naked. They had to stand with frost thick on the ground barefoot, clutching each other to keep warm. Shivering."

The South African government put heavy pressure on *The Rand Daily Mail* to stop Pogrund's newspaper series. Failing at this, they proceeded to place Strachan under house arrest. The gov-

ernment branded the series a calculated, if not treasonous, attempt to embarrass the republic. Despite this, the series was reprinted in the London *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *Africa Today*, and *The New York Times Magazine*.

Sources mentioned in the series were pressured to change their stories and dragged into court to testify against the *Mail*. In their patented clumsy way, the government had witnesses on the stands and in the newsholes of their Afrikaans newspapers painting far too rosy a picture of the state's prison system to be believed.

"The government seems determined to portray the prisons as pleasure resorts of such exquisite refinement that any normal South African would be tempted to a life of crime," wrote Joseph Lelyveld, then the resident correspondent of *The New York Times*.

Pogrund fell under a heavy twenty-four-hour police watch, and his passport was taken away. Eventually he and his editor would be hauled into court and offered a plea if the *Mail* would print an apology — which they refused. Both were put on trial and ruled guilty of publishing "false" information about South Africa's prisons.

As the officer in charge pressed Pogrund's fingerprints during booking, the journalist asked about the lengths the

government had gone to get them for publishing the series of prison stories at home and abroad. The saga had taken four years, including an eight-month trial that featured 105 state witnesses.

"You are the enemy," said the officer, Major Johan Coetzee, who would later become the commissioner of police. "We'll stop at nothing to get you." Pogrund was sentenced to six months imprisonment, suspended for three years. Gander, the *Mail's* editor in chief, was fined \$33 with imprisonment of six months if the fine were not paid. The fine was paid; neither served jail time, though the *Mail* never recovered from the blunt government attack. Gander was fired and Pogrund, the star reporter whose prison series had indeed brought improvements for inmates in the republic, was eased into the chair as night editor. From this ring-side seat at the *Mail*, Pogrund watched — and, in the most insightful material in the book, shares — the historic events of modern South Africa, starting with the 1976 Soweto uprising that set the republic irreversibly on the road to democracy under black majority rule. ■

Les Payne, an assistant managing editor at Newsday, has reported extensively from South Africa.

"A Stunning Achievement."



At better bookstores. To order direct, visit our website
www.oup-usa.org or call 1-800-451-7556

"An elegant *vade mecum*
for all those curious about the fastest growing
religion in the world."

—James Piscatori, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

"An impressive synthesis...
elegant, scholarly, and accessible....
Indispensable for any serious student."

—Karen Armstrong, author of *A History of God*

"Esposito—America's preeminent scholar of
Islam—has brought together an array of
international experts who present a masterful
survey."

—Tamara Sonn, College of William and Mary*

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Life's "Little Gets"

BY JOANMARIE KALTER

Television journalists may feel ever more pressured these days to get the big "get," but ABC correspondent Judy Muller, in her witty and perceptive memoir, *Now This: Radio, Television . . . and the Real World*, celebrates the value of life's "little gets." There are the stories she tells of raising two daughters as a divorced, single, working mom. Or of making the leap from network radio to TV at the age of forty-three, a career move that entailed uprooting her children when they were a junior and senior in high school. Or of finally coming to acknowledge — and control — her alcoholism.

Through it all, Muller has cultivated her talent for spotting life's absurdities. She compares herself, not inappropriately, to Erma Bombeck, for her drive to bear snappy, sometimes self-effacing witness to the ironic and perverse. In fact, it is the very power of such storytelling, the power to give content to chaos, as she says, to transform "angst into art or, at the very least, anecdote," that is Muller's true subject. The healing value of journalism is in shaping and sharing our stories, she says, and it's the key to sanity for Muller herself.

Among the many "little gets" recorded here, Muller also makes a few larger points about broadcast journalism. She began in radio, at WWHW in Princeton and KHOW in Denver, back in the mid-seventies when the pressure was on to hire women, and she retains an affection for this medium in which the choice of words still matters most. She moved on to CBS Radio Network, where she wrote and delivered early-morning commentaries and had the sticky task of calling and waking interview subjects at 5 A.M. Almost everyone was polite and willing to talk, she says, from the late Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson to Jesse Jackson to Desmond Tutu; the exception was none other than Dan Rather, who very courteously declined an interview, and then went on to blast her behind her back to the president of the radio news division for calling so early.

It was mostly during these radio days that Muller was lovingly but single-handedly raising two daughters. Every working parent will relate to her tales of

"emergency" calls five minutes before deadline — such as the one from her sobbing daughter that the hamster's eyeball was hanging out of the socket. "Well, shove it back in the socket and call me in ten minutes," she manages to say, struggling to sound at least slightly empathetic when her own eyeball is glued to the clock.

Much as she enjoyed radio, by 1988, covering the Bush presidential campaign, Muller had had it with being at the bottom of the broadcast food chain. She was almost bumped from the press plane in the middle of a blizzard in Montana

NOW THIS RADIO, TELEVISION . . . AND THE REAL WORLD

BY JUDY MULLER
G.P. PUTNAM SONS
256 PP. \$23.95

because CBS was late in its payments (no campaign would ever try to eject a network television correspondent), and reduced to crawling on her hands and knees in a sequined gown through a crowded inaugural ballroom to reach her engineer (while the TV correspondents there could literally look down on her from their reserved camera perches).

So in 1990 Muller accepted an offer from ABC TV to be their West Coast, L.A.-based correspondent, and in the decade since she has covered everything from earthquakes to O.J. to Columbine. She makes some wry observations about the intense pressure to look good in television, and the difficulty of resisting it. At first, she's bemused by the likes of the Lint Lady and the rest of the small army of stylists who buzz in to buff up Barbara Walters between takes of their pre-taped "chat" on *20/20*, but before long Muller is having a face-lift herself.

Unlike Lesley Stahl, whose recent memoir of her years at CBS, *Reporting Live* (CJR, January/February 1999), looked more on the sunny side, Muller doesn't shirk from condemning the commercial pressures she sees undermining serious journalism. To that old question of whether Edward R. Murrow's documentary "Harvest of Shame" would be aired today, Muller has a fresh answer: it would — as a TV magazine piece by a consumer reporter hyping the question, "Do you

know who's picking your lettuce? Are they clean?"

Muller is most piercing when she takes on the shameless and maudlin milking of tragedy that goes on in TV news today. She cites the question a network correspondent asked of Billy Graham after the John F. Kennedy, Jr. plane crash: "Reverend, can you please help us understand how God could do this to us?" To which Muller retorts: "I couldn't believe it. Did she expect God to say, in a deep rumbling voice, 'Pilot error'?"

Perhaps the most painful change for a hands-on storyteller like Muller is the increasing tendency of magazine shows to use the correspondent as merely a "face." She was busy writing a script one day when a colleague advised her that if she wanted to last on that program, where a correspondent could be working on six stories at once, she should airdrop in for interviews and stand-ups, voice the script, and let the producer do the writing. Witness the Peter Arnett debacle at CNN, Muller notes, in which Arnett blithely asserted he had contributed not a "single comma" to his story about America's alleged use of nerve gas in Southeast Asia.

Covering the high-school shootings in Littleton, Colorado, for *World News Tonight* brought together Muller's personal past (it was near where she had gotten her divorce and fought for custody of her children) with her professional present. And it brought home most clearly the ravages of media excess. There she was, bracing herself to call the parents of one of the murdered students, half hoping they would slam down the phone, feeling sick at the task, only to find, when the father answered, that *Dateline* and *20/20* already had crews at the house.

Much of what Muller relates here may be fairly familiar. Yet she brings an added depth to her subject when she concludes by musing on the limitations of the very act of storytelling she so extols. She's truly surprised to look back and see how her personal setbacks ultimately propelled her forward and she's at a loss to explain a world in which one day she's covering teenage weight loss, another day teenage lives lost. She realizes, finally, that she is more of a listener than a spinner of these tales, less able to control their course than to simply make a few choice edits now and then. ■

Joanmarie Kalter is a free-lance journalist based in Montclair, New Jersey.

BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

PEACE, WAR, AND POLITICS: AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

by Jack Anderson with Daryl Gibson
Forge: Tom Doherty Associates
432 pp. \$27.95

Jack Anderson has been around Washington for more than fifty years, aggressively uncovering stories in his syndicated column that officials (and sometimes, the elite press) would just as soon have left untold. In this chronicle, he recounts a life of muckraking from the perspective of the muckraker, with generous credit to the dozens of junior reporters, many now famous on their own, who have worked for him. A native of Utah born into a Mormon family, and a journalist since adolescence, he arrived in the capital at the age of twenty-five. He apprenticed under Drew Pearson, whom he recalls as not only a flamboyant columnist but also as a political meddler, and emerged on his own after Pearson's death in 1969. He engaged in a running conflict with the Nixon crowd, which may have had him on a hit list, and won his one Pulitzer Prize when he exposed administration duplicity during the India-Pakistan conflict. And he has had adventures with such varied figures as Billy Carter, Howard Hughes, and Muammar al-Qaddafi. Most interestingly, the book is an encyclopedia of ethical dilemmas: When to expose secret documents (usually). When to expose the private conduct of public figures (it depends). When to protect confidential sources (always). He admits blunders—for example, when he claimed under severe competitive pressure that he had evidence of drunken driving by Senator Thomas Eagleton though he had not seen the citations; he had to apologize face to face. And regrets, as when he ousted Spiro Agnew's son on the ground that the family of the vice president was automatically news. Throughout, Anderson, who is now in his upper seventies, has led a strenuous life that would have had men of lesser stamina staggering decades ago. Perhaps his well-advertised teetotaling helped; more likely, it was his feeling that there was always one more, one better story on tap and that he was chosen to tell it.

UNDEREXPOSED

Index on Censorship, 1999
258 pp. \$9.99

This century-ending issue of the London-based magazine devoted to tracking the world's censorship hardly celebrates the era just past. It has chosen to offer photographs of the past hundred years that were suppressed or distorted in presentation. Although there are brief, provocative essays by such writ-



Photos showing brutal treatment of prisoners by South Korea were not popular with Western publications in 1950

ers as Harold Evans and John le Carré, the nearly two hundred photographic images dominate the book, and overflow the categories to which they are assigned. They convey the century's violence, bloodshed, and oppression. As the introductory editorial observes, here are "records of events we're not supposed to know about, incidents we'd rather forget." The earliest is a c. 1900 photograph, suppressed at the time, of a British concentration camp filled with Boers; the most recent, a shot of a slaughtered family of African gorillas.

A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE LIFE, TIMES AND SALE OF A FAMILY-OWNED NEWSPAPER

by Mark Wineka
Down Home Press
325 pp. \$24.95

The story has been repeated hundreds of times over the last three or four decades. A family's community newspaper, owned for two, three, or four generations, has no heir apparent, faces prohibitive taxes, is besieged by buyers, and sells. Suddenly, the local newspaper is no longer entirely local.

The story of North Carolina's *Salisbury Post* is thus familiar, but worth telling. Three generations of James F. Hurleys maintained the *Post* from 1912 to 1997; it was increasingly respected and honored by its peers across the state. But the era of the Hurleys was destined to end with the third Hurley, Jimmy, who was plagued by poor health and was unable to find a successor. Mark Wineka, a reporter at the *Post*, has done a good job of gathering the basic information about the *Post* and presenting its gallery of characters, including the Hurleys, warts and all. Unfortunately, the writing and editing of the book are slapdash; the reader is faced with reading 325 pages of careless feature-style writing. At the end, in 1997, the *Post* and *Salisbury* got one break: the newspaper was sold to another family-owned company, the Manigaults' Evening Post Publishing Company, based in Charleston, which was able to provide a gentle transition into the new era. The *Post*'s Web site early this January showed that the old *Post* endures: the newspaper's senior reporter, Rose Zimmerman Post (the name is a coincidence), hired in 1951, was still on the job.

THE BIG CHILL: INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN THE CURRENT MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Edited by Marilyn Greenwald and Joseph Bernt
Iowa State University Press
244 pp. \$49.95

The title of this uneven anthology suggests that investigative reporting is being frozen out of contemporary journalism, but the writers give only ambiguous support to the thesis. If any trend is clear, it is a decline in investigating private entities, such as corporations. The most valuable articles are those that address specific legal threats facing investigative reporters. Jane Kirtley, until recently of the Reporters Committee on Freedom of the Press and now at the University of Minnesota, discusses the tendency of courts to criminalize newsgathering practices. Lisa Barr of DePaul University explores the little-understood field of libel insurance.

James Boylan is founding editor of CJR and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.



announces the establishment of

THE VICTOR COHN PRIZE FOR EXCELLENCE IN MEDICAL SCIENCE REPORTING

The inaugural \$3,000 award to be presented in October 2000

Deadline for nominations: July 31, 2000

Purpose. For the last several years there has been no opportunity for saluting general excellence in medical science writing for the mass media. With the establishment of The Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting, the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing, a not-for-profit educational organization, aims to fill that void, while bestowing well-deserved recognition upon its namesake for his exemplary, five-decade career in science and medical journalism.

The prize, to be given annually, seeks to honor a writer for a body of work, published or broadcast *within the last five years* which, for reasons of uncommon clarity, accuracy, breadth of coverage, enterprise, originality, insight and narrative power, has made a profound and lasting contribution to public awareness and understanding of critical advances in medical science and their impact on human health and well-being.

The Prize. The honoree will receive an award of \$3,000 and a framed certificate. The inaugural prize will be presented on the evening of October 31, 2000 at the annual banquet of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing to be held in conjunction with its 38th Annual New Horizons in Science Briefing at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Travel expenses for the recipient to the award ceremony will be covered.

The Nominating Process. Editors, colleagues, scientists, and others familiar with the candidate's body of work may proffer nominations. Individuals may not nominate themselves. The nominator should submit no more than six examples of the candidate's journalistic efforts, all published or aired since January 1995. Books are not eligible. The letter of nomination should include: an in-depth evaluation of the stories being submitted that, in the eyes of the nominator, make the candidate worthy of the prize and a biographical sketch of the candidate. Please provide six copies of the published work, or standard audio or video cassettes (accompanied by typed or printed scripts). The deadline for submission of material is July 31, 2000.

Send the nomination package to:
The Victor Cohn Prize, CASW, P.O. Box 404, Greenlawn, NY 11740

About Victor Cohn. As science and medical reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune* and then science editor, science and medical reporter and health columnist for the *Washington Post*, Victor Cohn distinguished himself for the clarity, honesty, robustness, fairness and effectiveness of his reporting. He was at the forefront of coverage of virtually every major advance in medicine over the last five decades, from the triumph of the Salk polio vaccine and the first human experiments with cancer chemotherapy to the eradication of smallpox and the manipulation of human genes.

About CASW. The Council for the Advancement of Science Writing is a 24-member panel composed of distinguished scientists, journalists and educators. Co-founded in 1959 by Victor Cohn, CASW develops and funds initiatives to help newspaper, magazine and broadcast reporters, as well as public information specialists at universities and academic institutions, present accurate, reliable and informative stories to the lay public about developments in science, medicine and technology.

For more information, visit our website: www.casw.org or call 631-757-5664.

The Lower case

Bad hair means bad day, study says

Cubans march over 6-year-old

Amarillo Globe-Times (Amarillo, Tex.) 1/28/00



The Indiana Gazette (Indiana, Pa.) 1/26/00

Gun makers are in a vice

South Bend Tribune (South Bend, Ind.) 12/13/99

Dog chews on recall list

The Fresno Bee 12/31/99

Smoke at Tosco refinery may mean air quality fine

San Jose Mercury News 12/17/99

Rowland supports prison for girls only

New Haven Register
(New Haven, Conn.) 1/5/00

SATURDAY'S ANSWER:

Did you experience any Y2K technical problems?

Due to technical difficulties, the results of Saturday's question were not available.

The Denver Post 1/2/00

In Indian Visit Pope Appeals For

The Washington Post 11/7/99

Fax your ad copy to Jim at 610-964-6061. We'll professionally typeset you ad for you.



Multichannel News 8/16/99

Taped to the supply cabinets that line the walls behind a cluttered art table, Denise Young has put the dreams of her students on display.

The News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.) 11/22/99

CARDINAL O'CONNOR ... Delivering hominy ...

The Indiana Gazette (Indiana, Pa.) 11/21/99

Prostate cancer more common in men

The Hermann Advertiser-Courier (Hermann, Mo.) 12/1/99

Japanese scientists grow frog eyes and ears

Daily Camera (Boulder, Colo.) 1/4/00

CJR offers \$25 for items published in The Lower case. Please send only original, unmutilated clippings suitable for reproduction, together with name and date of publication, and include your social security number for payment.



Last year, three Eastern Washington newspapers took on tough diversity issues. Their courage did not go unnoticed.



First to notice were readers of *The Spokesman-Review* in Spokane, *The Wenatchee World* and the *Yakima Herald-Republic*. Residents of these largely rural Eastern Washington regions were challenged with quality, in-depth coverage of potentially sensitive stories.

The *Spokesman-Review* investigated the white supremacist group Aryan Nation in "In it together." *The Wenatchee World* explored the failure of affirmative action and minority employment in local government. And the *Yakima Herald-Republic* tackled the ongoing problem of "Farm Worker Housing" for a largely migrant work force in area orchards and fields.

Next to notice were judges in The Seattle Times C.B. Blethen Awards, the premier annual journalism competition for Pacific Northwest newspapers. They acknowledged the quality of the work, risks taken, limited resources and solutions offered—and awarded each newspaper a C.B. Blethen Award for Distinguished Coverage of Diversity. This award is one of the few awards in the country to recognize exceptional journalism on diversity issues.

The Seattle Times is proud to honor Pacific Northwest journalists and newspapers working to change the face of intolerance and bigotry in our land.

The C.B. Blethen Awards, created in 1977 to honor C.B. Blethen, publisher of The Seattle Times from 1915 to 1941, are sponsored by The Seattle Times and administered by the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Association.

The Seattle Times

